



A RECORD OF A MORTAL'S JOURNEY TO IMMORTALITY

BOOK 06

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EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

A Record of a Mortal's Journey to Immortality

(凡人修仙传)

by

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(忘语)

Synopsis

A poor and ordinary boy from a village joins a minor sect in Jiang Hu and becomes an Unofficial Disciple by chance.

How will Han Li, a commoner by birth, establish a foothold for himself in his sect?

With his mediocre aptitude, how will he successfully traverse the path of cultivation and become an immortal?

This is a story of an ordinary mortal who, against all odds, clashes with devilish demons and the ancient celestials in order to find his own path to immortality.

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Chapter 501: Southclear Island

Inspiring awe in all those who witnessed his passage, Han Li eventually arrived in the nearby seas of the Heavenly Star City. As he was only a few days away, Han Li put away his blood-red cloak and resumed traveling as an ordinary streak of light.

Currently, the Scattered Star Seas were in disarray and it was possible that a Nascent Soul cultivator would be nearby. As Han Li didn't wish to capture the attention of such a powerful individual, he moved in a more inconspicuous manner. Fortunately, he hadn't heard any news of the Starfall Coalition appearing nearby. Much to his relief, it seemed he had managed to arrive in time.

He had arrived at the outskirts of the last intermediary island before Heavenly Star City. Although it wasn't large, it held many cultivators from the Star Palace. It seemed they were the forward sentries for Heavenly Star City.

In the past, the island would have boats of all sizes flowing in and out of its harbor with cultivators and mortals leaving and arriving at the island en masse. But now, when Han Li swept his gaze past the island, he only spotted a few small boats. As for cultivators, he would only occasionally come across them.

It seemed both the mortals and cultivators knew that a war was imminent and meekly avoided the area for the time being. The only cultivators that dared to come to the island were mostly from factions wishing to scour through the rumors.

Having traveled for such a long period, Han Li felt somewhat fatigued and decided to stop over at the island for the time being. Not only to rest, but to visit the island's market in preparation for his long excursion in the Outer Star Seas. After all, he didn't know how things currently were in Heavenly Star City. As such, it would be best for him to make his preparations here and avoid any mishaps from catching him unprepared.

When Han Li descended within range of the island, he was able to sense that Southclear Island was on far greater alert than during his previous visits. Just as he entered the scope of the island's spell formation, he was able to feel the spiritual sense of three Core Formation cultivators sweep past him. They had even lingered on him for quite some time until they had deemed him unsuspecting.

It was clear that the Star Palace was guarding itself against any sudden attacks by the Starfall Coalition.

At that moment, Han Li was calmly heading towards the island's market.

Southclear Island's market was in a small city not far from the island's port, likely for the convenience of any merchants or cultivators that visited. Although the market wasn't nearly as famous or as large as those on other islands, its variety of goods was unrivaled by any other market. More importantly, its prices were cheaper than in Heavenly Star City. This was because a majority of Heavenly Star City's goods were directly shipped over from this island.

Han Li didn't have any time to dawdle. Just as he entered the market, he took out the Bone Sage's Ninecurl Ginseng pill formula and read through it.

Now knowing the required ingredients by heart, he bluntly began to search through ingredient stores of all sizes.

...

Inside a large room, an ordinary middle-aged cultivator said with a careful tone, "Senior, I am truly sorry! Junior has opened a materials shop for so many years, yet he had never heard of 'Thousand Leaves Dew' before. As for 'Agate Horn', it is the horn that is grown off of the rare Agate Beast. Few cultivators ever get to see it. I fear Senior will have to go look through other stores or auction halls to see if they have it."

“This is the largest materials shop on the island. If you don’t have it, then the other shops won’t either. As for the auction halls, I currently do not have the time for them.” Han Li frowned and sat down in the chair across from the middle-aged cultivator. He softly tapped his finger against the side of the chair in annoyance.

The middle-aged cultivator revealed slight embarrassment at Han Li’s words. However, he was being honest when he said that he had no way of acquiring the items that Han Li wanted. As such, he could only continue to ingratiatingly smile. After all, he was in the presence of a rarely seen Core Formation expert; he could not afford to offend him.

When Han Li saw the shopkeeper’s attitude, he knew that he truly didn’t have the two items. With a sigh, Han Li stood up and walked out.

It seemed that he would have to think of other methods to find the last two ingredients for the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng. Fortunately, he was still quite a long way from the peak of Core Formation. As the medicine could only be used upon the formation of a Nascent Soul, he wasn’t in any rush.

Just as the middle-aged cultivator was about to respectfully send Han Li off from the entrance, he suddenly thought of something and hesitated for a moment before saying, “While you might know of its name as the ‘Thousand Leaves Dew’, it may be known by another name.”

A strange light flickered from Han Li’s eyes and he stopped, curiously asking, “Oh? What does that mean?”

The middle-aged man honestly replied, “Not to boast, but this Junior has spent over a hundred years managing this ingredient store. I’ve seen all sorts of bizarre and rare ingredients. If there is an ingredient I haven’t heard of, it is likely being referred to by the name passed down from ancient cultivators. In current times, it may be known by another title. This was something that I have

encountered several times before. This Thousand Leaves Dew might actually be a rather common medicinal ingredient.”

Han Li’s heart stirred. He felt that the man’s words made much sense.

After all, the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng was an item from legend. It made sense for its formula to be passed down from antiquity. It seems he would have to examine a few ancient records to find out its true identity.

With that thought, Han Li nodded with a relaxed expression and silently left the store.

Afterwards, Han Li sifted through all of his pill formulas suitable for Core Formation cultivators, and made preparations for his future pill refinement. Han Li especially stocked up on the supplementary ingredients that couldn’t be grown with the liquid from his small bottle.

The current journey to the Outer Star Seas would take a long while without doubt. Han Li didn’t wish for his mass creation of pills to fail because of a shortage of common materials, and slow down his own progress in cultivation as a result.

With his current collection of magic treasures along with the aid of a few flag formations, he should be able to handle grade seven demon beasts without question. Naturally, if he were to come across any grade eight demon beasts, he would have no choice but to flee. Once demon beasts reached grade eight, it is said that their wisdom would be far greater than ordinary humans and their bodies are able to take human-like forms. Due to their exceedingly powerful innate skills, they would have a tremendous advantage over Nascent Soul cultivators of the same rank.

Several hours later, Han Li managed to gather everything together and left the market city in the direction of the port.

At that moment, the sky suddenly filled with black clouds,

turning the sky into the image of a cloudy night.

A short moment later, a relentless barrage of light shot towards the island from the horizon, leaving roars of thunder in its wake.

Han Li's expression suddenly change and he hastily strained his magic power, tearing through the sky in an azure streak.

From the pressure being emitted, it seemed that the barrage came from the simultaneous attack of at least a thousand cultivators.

In the following moment, a large formation activated and covered the entire island in a barrier of scarlet light, managing to rigidly block the attack. At the same moment, there were many white clothed cultivators that struck back at the attackers in the sky with their own magic tools.

Han Li bitterly laughed. The Starfall Coalition had moved remarkably quick. They even managed to bring the battle so close to Heavenly Star Island in only a few months.

Heavenly Star City would surely receive news of this sudden battle through specialized means. Now, his current plans of rushing towards Heavenly Star City had been completely ruined.

Extremely vexed, Han Li's expression fluctuated for a long while before he suddenly stamped his foot on the ground. Then with a series of distortions, his body disappeared from sight.

Although he was disinclined to involve himself in the battle, he still stealthily released his spiritual sense. If he had guessed correctly, the harbor and its surroundings should be quite active.

As expected, many streaks of light soon shot towards Southclear Island's harbor from inside the island. But as they grew closer, they all disappeared from sight, quietly laying low as they observed the battle unfolding above.

A majority of them were Foundation Establishment cultivators, numbering over a hundred, with only about thirty Qi

Condensation cultivators mixed among them. As for Core Formation cultivators like Han Li, there were only five or six with the highest ranked cultivator being at the mid Core Formation stage.

Although this person was silently watching from the cover of the hills, Han Li's spiritual sense was vastly superior to his, allowing Han Li to observe him without being noticed.

While Han Li's spiritual sense wasn't as powerful as a Nascent Soul cultivator's, by cultivating the Great Development Technique, it wasn't that much weaker either. Since he could even conceal himself from a nearby early Nascent Soul cultivator, it was only natural for him to be able to do this much.

To the best of his knowledge, a majority of Nascent Soul cultivators lingered at early Nascent Soul stage without any hope of advancement. And much to his relief, he couldn't sense such a monster nearby.

However, since the Starfall Coalition dared to attack Southclear Island, there should be at least one Nascent Soul cultivator in the main host. As such, Han Li could only conceal himself and meekly wait for the conclusion of the battle before stealthily slipping away.

Chapter 502: Questioning

The battle at the harbor didn't continue for long. As the red barrier released glimmers of light from the impact by the multi-colored barrage, an immense grey radiance brimming with evil Qi suddenly struck it.

With the assistance of the dense bombardment of magic tools and techniques, the great formation eventually began to waver. With a series of booms, the red barrier violently flickered and eventually ruptured with a sharp explosion.

Unknown whether it was due to the formation spell's might or the Star Palace's own doing, the fragments of the red light barrier slowly spread through the sky in a final burst of radiance, sowing chaos throughout the ranks of the Star Defiance Coalition. As if having planned for this, the Star Palace cultivators took advantage of the opportunity to escape.

Among the escaping cultivators, there were those that shot out of the harbor at exceptional speed. They seemed to be the high grade cultivators that had remained on the island.

At nearly the same time, over ten streaks of similarly powerful light shot after them in close pursuit. In the blink of an eye, the streaks of light had disappeared without a trace.

It seems the upper echelon of the Star Defiance Coalition wanted to get rid of all of the Star Palace cultivators on Southclear Island in one clean swoop, without allowing even a single to escape.

At that moment, the many cultivators of the Star Defiance Coalition began to slowly descend from the sky. From their clothes, it was clear to see that the group consisted of people from two different sects. One of the uniform consisted of silver robes lined with gold while the other was completely green robes. It appeared that both the Righteous and Devilish Dao were acting together.

Han Li felt quite surprised at how quickly the battle had concluded, but he soon made sense of it. There was a vast difference in power between the defenders and attackers. While the Star Palace had done their utmost, their will alone couldn't compensate for the sheer lack of numbers.

As Han Li was wondering whether or not he should take advantage of the disorder to escape from the island, an old man flew out from the group of green-robed cultivators. When Han Li swept his spiritual sense past him, he perceived the old man to be an early Core Formation cultivator.

The man calmly flew above the spectators by the harbor and swept his gaze over them. He then said with a deep voice, "Listen well, Fellow Daoists. Under the orders of Elder Wang of the Star Defiance Coalition, I, Enforcer Cang Yunlong, announce that the Star Palace has been routed from the island. In order to prevent any misunderstandings, I hope none of you will hastily attempt to leave the island. For the next four hours, we will be pursuing the remnants of the Star Palace forces. Everyone may leave after that. I ask that everyone please remain calm. Our alliance only holds malice towards the Star Palace and their allies. We won't act against any other Fellow Daoists." Although his voice wasn't very loud, it was clear and resounding, allowing all of the nearby cultivators to hear him clearly.

The cultivators that were concealed nearby couldn't help but look at each other. Since no one took the initiative to spread or to stir up any trouble, the following moments were filled with complete silence.

When Han Li heard this proclamation, he felt relieved. It seemed that in order to win over the hearts of others, they were unwilling to treat neutral cultivators unfairly. If he was going to be somewhat late, then so be it. Even if he were to leave now, it was still uncertain whether or not he would be able to sneak into the city.

Just as Han Li thought this, the green-robed old man wordlessly flew back. When Han Li saw the old man disappear, he didn't immediately take action.

Perhaps due to the old man's words or their missions, the other cultivators also didn't depart from the port. Instead, they closely watched the actions of the Starfall Coalition.

At that moment, the silver-robed cultivators were dismantling the formation in an orderly fashion and started to place down their own formation spell. As for the green robed cultivators, half of them stayed near the harbor on guard while the others flew right past Han Li towards the center of the island. It appeared that Southclear Island was about to become the beachhead through which the Coalition would launch their attacks on Heavenly Star City.

Seeing these cultivators silently carrying out their orders with such discipline was quite a shock to Han Li. It seemed the Righteous and Devil Dao had long planned for their rise to supremacy in the Scattered Star Seas. After all, training such disciplined cultivators wasn't a matter of only a mere several tens of years.

However, Han Li felt quite baffled that the Star Palace would choose to passively wait for the Starfall Coalition to attack. Were they so weak that they couldn't counterattack or was the Star Palace merely stalling for time so the Heavenly Star Sages could have a chance to leave seclusion?

Han Li felt quite puzzled by this, but after some more thought, he broke out into laughter. Regardless of what plans and hidden intrigue the Star Palace and the Starfall Coalition may have in store, they had absolutely nothing to do with a rogue cultivator such as himself. So long as he went out of his way to be careful, there shouldn't be any way for him to become wrapped up in their schemes.

With that thought, Han Li regained his calm once more.

After patiently waiting for four hours, the green-robed old man and three more Core Formation cultivators returned to the harbor.

As the old man floated in mid-air, he said with a clear voice, “Fellow Daoists, if you wish to leave the island, you merely have to either display a token of your identity or show us your cultivation art. If you do not wish to leave, then you may continue to stay here. So long as you possess no enmity with the Starfall Coalition, you will be treated fairly.”

After these words were said, there was a moment of uproar before silence returned. Although the words sounded polite, no one wished to reveal themselves.

Righteous Dao cultivators were particularly disinclined to reveal themselves to these Devil Dao cultivators as their previous relations weren’t particularly great. If they had made a previous indiscretion and caused offence, they would be damning themselves by moving forward! Although the possibility was quite small, they didn’t wish to test the waters themselves and would rather have others brave the risk instead.

Han Li also remained still as he wasn’t about to make himself stand out either. As the opposition was only Core Formation cultivators, he could remain concealed with ease as their spiritual sense was incapable of detecting him.

After a long moment of silence, when the green-robed man started to appear gloomy, a white streak of light eventually flew towards him.

A young man obediently flew before the old man and respectfully saluted him, “Junior is the Sky Opening Sect’s disciple Xin Ming. I’ve seen Senior before. This is my token of identification, a white water sword.” He then took out a sparkling white sword and handed it over to him.

After the old man examined the sword, his face relaxed and he handed it back to the young man. “Oh, the Sky Opening Sect! I’ve indeed met Esteemed Sect Master Daoist Liu before. This magic tool is held by all Sky Opening Sect disciples. You may go.”

The young man then smiled and respectfully bid his farewells before flying out of the harbor. Not a single cultivator from the Starfall Coalition blocked his way.

Seeing that the young man had managed to leave the island without any difficulties, others began to fly towards the old man and reveal themselves.

The old man seemed rich with experience. Regardless of what token or cultivation art they revealed, the old man was able to identify it at a glance, much to the surprise of Han Li.

When Han Li saw a Core Formation such as himself be allowed to leave, he began to feel impatient. He then revealed himself and flew towards the sky as a streak of azure light.

“Who might Fellow Daoist be?” When the old man saw that Han Li was a Core Formation cultivator, his tone became slightly more tactful.

“I am the guest elder of the Exquisite Sound Sect. This is my sect token. Please, have a look!” On the day that Fairy Violet Spirit had deemed him an elder, she had given him a badge. Han Li took it out and handed it over to the old man without hesitation.

The old man carefully examined the token and stared at Han Li as he said, “Exquisite Sound Sect? The guest elders of your sect should be named Han Li and Crooked Soul, both of whom are often in secluded cultivation and rarely seen. Which one of them are you?”

Han Li’s heart trembled, but he wore a calm smile instead, “My name is Han Li! I didn’t expect that Fellow Daoist would know the name of a fameless vagrant cultivator such as myself. Impressive!”

The old man chuckled and spoke with an unexpectedly polite tone, “Hehe, it was nothing. Your esteemed sect is famous throughout the Scattered Star Seas, especially your sect’s Fairy Violet Spirit. Our clan’s young master has long wished to see her exceptional beauty. I hope Fellow Daoist can pass those words along.”

Shock momentarily appeared on his face before he hesitantly asked, “Young master? Who might you be speaking of...?”

“My sect’s young master is the sole descendant of the great ancestor. Although few know of his name right now, it will later reverberate throughout the Scattered Star Seas.”

Han Li was inwardly flabbergasted, but he agreed, “Alright. If I come across the sect leader, I will be sure to pass those words on!”

The old man appeared quite satisfied with Han Li’s response. After fumbling with the token for a moment more, he gave the token back to Han Li and said, “Good! As there is nothing wrong with your token, you may go.”

After Han Li saluted him, he unhurriedly flew off.

The old man revealed a strange expression as he watched Han Li fly off towards the horizon.

Chapter 503: Another Clash

The burly man amongst the Core Formation cultivators saw the old man's face and asked with surprise, "What is it? Was there something amiss? Was his identity false?"

The old man twirled his beard with his finger before revealing a green jade slip in his palm. "There is nothing wrong with his identity. We've long acquired the portraits of the two elders from our agents in the Exquisite Sound Sect. His appearance is an exact match for what we were given. There is no doubt that he is Elder Han. Even if he was a pretender using some sort of secret disguise technique, he won't be able to escape Elder Wang's discerning eye when he leaves the harbor."

The burly man snorted with dissatisfaction, "Since there is no problem, why did you wear that expression?"

After muttering to himself for a second, the old man said, "The Exquisite Sound Sect's Elder Han is no simple character. I fear that even if we were to both take him on, we would not be victorious."

The burly man was stunned before shaking his head as if he were beating a drum with it. He doubtfully said, "What does that mean? Isn't he an early Core Formation cultivator just like us? Moreover, he is a vagrant cultivator. How could he compare to the two of us who have received the frequent teachings of our Divine Ancestor?"

The old man wasn't annoyed by his words in the slightest and calmly gave him an explanation, "Enforcer Liu should know that although our Seven Fiends Arts can't be considered a top grade cultivation technique, we are extremely sensitive to the amount of baleful Qi one possesses. The baleful Qi that he possesses is the heaviest I've ever seen from a Core Formation cultivator. No small number of cultivators has died by his hand."

The burly man objected, "That's nothing. So what if he killed a few low grade cultivators? I could do that too."

“It’s not the same. Although you can accumulate a bit of weak baleful Qi from that, it would last for but a short moment, and would easily disappear. As for this person, not only is his baleful Qi exceedingly dense, but it is also extremely cold. This is something that can only be developed by killing a great number of cultivators of similar rank or higher. Unless he uses a few specific secret techniques to rid himself of the baleful Qi, it will forever haunt his body.”

After a cold glint flickered from his eyes, he imposingly continued, “Furthermore, he seems to have comprehend a few miraculous sword Qi techniques, causing the span of his baleful Qi to be exceptionally large. It is truly astonishing. If an ordinary cultivator were to fight him, not only would their bewitchment and illusionary techniques be weakened, but if his baleful Qi were to be fully cultivated, his opponents could temporarily lose their will to fight if they do not protect against it. If he were to cultivate our Seven Fiend Arts, he would make rapid advancements.”

Of course, the old man didn’t know that Han Li had sparsely killed Core Formation cultivators, but instead killed several hundreds of their equivalent, grade five demon beasts. The reason for his heavy baleful Qi was completely different from what he had imagined.

The burly man blankly stared for a moment before puzzlingly asking, “Enforcer Cang, could it be that you wish to take him as a disciple? Regardless of his baleful Qi, he won’t become your disciple. Don’t forget that he is a Core Formation cultivator as well.”

The old man calmly said, “Take him in as a disciple? Of course not. I was merely interested in the method he used to accumulate such strong baleful Qi. He must have a secret.”

Having heard that, the burly man lost interest. He reckoned that in the entire Scattered Star Seas, any cultivation arts that draw on support from the baleful Qi to progress all belonged to renegade

sects. As his own cultivation art was not one of them, he felt disinterested.

But the burly man soon thought of something and asked with a puzzled expression, “You said that the young master was interested in the Exquisite Sound Sect’s Fairy Violet Spirit. Why haven’t I heard of this before? Could he have told you in private?”

“Hehe! The young master need not tell me anything. You should know the cultivation art that the young master cultivates. With the widespread fame of Fairy Violet Spirit’s beauty, if we are able to present the woman to our young master, there will be many rewards. The young master has just reached late Core Formation stage. With the Sacred Ancestor’s pointers and protection, I reckon that he will become a Nascent Soul cultivator in less than a hundred years!”

The burly man was rendered speechless for a moment before he excitedly nodded his head.

The burly man then rubbed his hands with a sinister smile and said, “Then when should we act? It appears that the young master is about to leave seclusion.”

The old man calmly said, “There is no need to rush. It would be best to do this after the next great battle. After all, it would be better to act after we have displayed the might of our Starfall Coalition. If they are unwilling to yield when the time comes, we’ll be able to seize her under the pretext of that she possesses secret ties to the Star Palace. As she established her sect in Heavenly Star City, she will have to obediently comply.”

The burly man rejoiced and laughed, “Good! Since they only have two early Core Formation elders, they won’t dare to stop our scheme. Fellow Daoist Cang is truly clever!”

The old man smiled upon hearing him. At the same time, he contentedly thought, ‘Like this, I will be able to pressure the Exquisite Sound Sect’s Elder Han into obediently handing over his

secret for accumulating baleful Qi. Two birds with one stone!’

With that thought, the old man narrowed his eyes and wore a strange expression.

...

Han Li had now reached the end of the harbor. After taking a few glances at the bustling Starfall Coalition cultivators on the island, he decided to speed up.

But at that moment, a formidable spiritual sense suddenly enveloped him without restraint. Han Li was startled, but he soon stopped and remained floating in the sky.

This was something that he had earlier anticipated. How could the Starfall Coalition allow Core Formation cultivators to be released on something as simple as a token?

Han Li reckoned that the owner of the spiritual sense was their leader, a Nascent Soul eccentric, using his spiritual sense to examine him. It seemed this was a measure to prevent Core Formation cultivators from using secret techniques to alter their appearance and escape the island with a false identity.

Han Li’s expression was completely calm and didn’t reveal the slightest panic. He hadn’t even bothered to consider using a false identity from the very beginning. This was because these techniques could be seen through by those with formidable spiritual sense, unless one used a legendary technique from antiquity or an extremely precious magic treasure.

Had he superficially changed his appearance and used a false identity, he would appear quite suspicious were he to be caught, causing a huge backlash.

Instead, he would rather take advantage of his status as an elder of the Exquisite Sound Sect and take the risk of leaving a trail behind for Zenith Yin and the others. By the time the eccentrics tracked him down, he would already be in the Outer Star Seas, and

be completely untouchable.

With that in mind, Han Li calmly allowed the Nascent Soul cultivator to examine him with his spiritual sense. As expected, the spiritual sense soon disappeared without leaving a mark on his body.

Han Li let out a long sigh and calmly flew towards the sea.

Not long after Han Li left the island, he began to fly at his top speed.

As the blood-red cloak would attract too much attention near the conflict, he could only fly through normal means.

Half a day later, Han Li was wondering how he should enter the city while he flew when he came to a sudden stop. He frowned and examined his surroundings with a puzzled gaze.

His expression suddenly stiffened as he gazed into the distance. He enveloped his body in a layer of faint azure light and motionlessly floated in place.

After a short moment, a blue and a red streak of light flew towards him with the speed of lightning. The lights arrived in front of Han Li in an instant, fading away to reveal two middle-aged cultivators wearing silver robes with gold lining.

Starfall Coalition cultivators!

Both of the men were early Core Formation cultivators. One of them appeared scholarly, possessing a pale face and no beard. The other was a rather robust man with tan skin.

Since they had both appeared, they just coldly stared at Han Li without a word. Their spiritual senses were obviously locked onto Han Li as if they were about to take action.

Han Li's expression stirred for a moment. He then asked them with a deep voice, "What business do you two have? I am in a hurry. If you have nothing to say, then I will take my leave."

“Wrong! You will be coming with us!” The robust man icily spoke with a commanding tone.

Han Li scowled and his eyes coldly glinted. “Have I offended you two? Or has the Starfall Coalition taken to tyrannically arresting people as they please?”

“Fellow Daoist, please do not be angry. We are under orders to pursue and eliminate any Star Palace remnants. We managed to wound a Star Palace cultivator just recently, but he managed to escape in this direction using a strange technique. It just so happened we found you while in pursuit of him. According to our knowledge, the Star Palace cultivators possesses face changing techniques. As we are unable to tell if your appearance is genuine, we must ask you to accompany us until we find the cultivator that escaped.” The scholarly middle-aged man spoke quite politely, but he obviously had no intention of letting Han Li go.

Chapter 504: The Might of Ancient Treasures

Han Li grew silent in response to the scholarly man's words, and his expression continuously shifted as he considered his options.

The two Righteous Dao cultivators tacitly glanced at each other before vigilantly watching Han Li.

Han Li smiled and serenely said, "Alright, since I have no immediate affairs, I will accompany you two!"

The two men's expressions immediately relaxed. A trace of satisfaction appeared on the scholarly man's face as he opened his mouth to say something.

At that moment, Han Li struck.

His right hand suddenly emerged from his sleeve, silently shooting six streaks of azure light towards the large man. At the same time, he waved his left hand, summoning a chain of five-colored copper bands in his palm. It started to release a muffled hum.

"You dare to attack?" The scholarly man quickly reacted. Upon seeing Han Li attack, he immediately spat out a square magic treasure several inches wide. It was flat and pitch-black, appearing to be an inkstone of sorts.

The robust man quickly moved as well and released a white jade stamp that glowed with white light. The magic treasure immediately increased several times in size as it met the six streaks of azure light.

At that moment, the scholarly man saw the copper bands in Han Li's hand and shouted out a warning, "Be careful of the copper bands!"

The large man was unable to utter a response. The six streaks of

azure light had released a clear ring before splitting into twelve identical swordlights. Six of the twelve lights then suddenly merged into a huge sword and fiercely cut down upon the white jade stamp.

The other six streaks of swordlight then changed direction and swiftly arced off to the side.

The large man was greatly alarmed. Without the time to think, he hastily formed an incantation gesture. Bursts of blue light with vivid talisman characters contained within them flourished around him. The flourishes of blue light wildly expanded and formed a barrier of blue light around the large man. The large man intended to directly receive the attack of Han Li's Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

Of course, the scholarly man didn't stay still as all of this happened. After he had initially shouted, he hastily pointed to the inkstone floating in front of him. It quickly swiveled and released a black fog. In a second, the fog had already reached the span of ten meters, flooding the nearby surroundings with the smell of ink.

Then without hesitation, the scholarly man cast an incantation seal, causing the black fog to rapidly condense into a flock of thirty pitch-black birds that were each about half a foot long. Then with a monstrous cry, they shot towards Han Li with a flicker of red light.

Han Li turned a blind eye to the attack, and had his copper bands sway several times before disappearing with a shimmer. He then summoned his ancient flower basket with a flip of his hand.

Seeing that Han Li was completely unconcerned with his attack, the scholarly man rejoiced rather than becoming angry. His Bewildering Inkstone was created from ancient refinement methods; it was only through sheer luck and tremendous effort that he had been able to successfully create it. He had nearly used up half of his life to save up for it, but he had no regrets. Ever since

he acquired the Bewildering Inkstone, he had rarely met a cultivator of the same grade that could pose a threat to him. Even mid Core Formation cultivators found it troublesome. So long as the target's cultivation wasn't vastly superior to his own, they would be immediately trapped in an inescapable illusion after becoming enveloped by the ink fog.

The scholarly man couldn't help but sneer as the birds shot towards Han Li. He clutched his hands in an incantation seal, intending to order his birds to rupture. But at that same moment, he suddenly heard a low hum next to his ear. His limbs and neck were suddenly clasped in copper bands. When they tightened, both his movements and his magic power were completely restrained.

At that moment, the scholarly man felt full of terror.

He had been on alert for the copper bands that had disappeared, but there wasn't the slightest warning before they had clasped themselves onto his body. This situation was far beyond his wildest expectation. In that moment, the scholarly man was flusteredly thinking of any method to escape.

On the other side of the battle, azure light and white Qi interweaved amongst each other as the huge azure sword and the large stamp block collided with a boom.

The brilliant white Qi was able to easily overwhelm the azure light, causing the huge sword to only last for mere moments before collapsing. At that same instant, the other six streaks of azure light had already arrived at the strange barrier of talisman characters.

Muffled bangs sounded out as the six streaks of azure light collided against the blue barrier. Although the blue barrier flickered upon impact, it was still able to endure.

Han Li felt slightly surprised by this. It seemed that without the Divine Devilbane Lightning, his Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were somewhat lacking in strength due to how little time he had spent tempering them.

But before he could think any further, the black birds arrived before him.

Although they didn't have the support of the scholarly man's magic power, the inkstone magic treasure was still linked to his spiritual sense; their attack hadn't relented in the slightest.

Han Li coldly snorted and the flower basket bloomed with light. The light wildly expanded and enveloped all of the birds without exception.

The scholarly man paled and shouted with disbelief, "Impossible! How can you have so many ancient treasures?"

It would already be extremely lucky for an ordinary cultivator to possess one ancient treasure. After all, most ancient treasures fell into the hands of Nascent Soul cultivators whenever they emerged, rendering it extremely difficult for a Core Formation cultivator to even lay their hands on one.

However, Han Li didn't have the slightest interest in replying. He tossed away the flower basket. The flower basket then collided against the large stamp block and enveloped it with its light. Although the stamp wildly struggled to escape, it was to little success.

Afterwards, Han Li then flicked his fingers, ruthlessly shooting ten streaks of azure sword Qi towards the restrained scholarly man.

"Nooo!" The scholarly man could only shout in terror before his body swayed from the impact of the sword Qi. With his body torn to shreds, his life quickly faded away. As the Five Element Bands had sealed his true essence and cultivation, his doom was all but assured.

Then with a gesture, the Five Element Bands disappeared with a shimmer before reappearing into Han Li's hand.

Han Li's gaze coldly turned to the side.

Head laced with sweat, the large man clutched an incantation gesture in an attempt to retrieve his stamp as the six azure swords continued to hammer down on his blue talisman barrier. Of course, his effort was in vain.

The large man's mind was shaken after having seen how easily his companion was dealt with. When he saw Han Li's attention shift onto him, he felt his body break out in a chill.

He gritted his teeth and suddenly flew off as a streak of blue light, abandoning his own soul-linked magic treasure in a decisive move!

Han Li narrowed his eyes, and his copper bands disappeared from view once more. A moment later, they appeared above the fleeing man's head.

The large man couldn't believe his eyes as the five copper bands locked onto his body, passing through his blue barrier as if there was nothing there. At that same moment, the blue light surrounding him suddenly disappeared as he fell from the sky with a tumble.

A cold glint flashed from Han Li's eyes. A streak of azure light fell from the sky and wound around the large man several times, cutting him into pieces.

Both of the two Starfall Coalition cultivators had already been slain by Han Li's hand.

At that moment, Han Li effortlessly took their storage pouches and looked through them with his spiritual sense for a moment before calmly putting them away.

As for the masterless block stamp and inkstone magic treasures, Han Li helped himself to them as well.

With his hands behind his back, Han Li then lowered his head towards the ocean and said, "Fellow Daoist has been stealthily watching for quite some time. How about you come out for a fresh breath of air?" Although his voice wasn't very loud, it could be

clearly heard from a kilometer away.

A sea breeze blew past Han Li before the area returned to silence once more.

Han Li sighed upon seeing this. With a sullen expression, he said with an irritated tone, “Must I drag your esteemed self out from the sea myself?”

With Han Li having discovered his hiding spot, the concealed individual couldn’t help but flusteredly say, “Fellow Daoist, please wait. I am coming out right now.”

Chapter 505: Ling Yuling

Han Li felt somewhat astonished upon hearing the person's voice.

The sea beneath him rippled and flashed with white light before revealing a cultivator slowly flying out from the sea.

The new arrival wore the white attire of the Star Palace, possessed long black hair, and had an emerald-green headband embedded with jade.

Upon being able to clearly see the person's appearance, Han Li revealed slight amazement.

The person had flawless white skin, thick dark eyebrows, delicate red lips, pointed eyes, and a thin nose. The Star Palace cultivator was undoubtedly beautiful, but what shocked Han Li was that he couldn't tell whether the person was a man or a woman.

If this person was a woman, one might say that her mouth formed a natural smile and that her every movement carried a trace of confidence and ease. If one were to say the person was a man, then one might say that his beautiful appearance held an unconcealable charm, one that proved fatally attractive towards other men.

“Although I do not know your esteemed name, I am grateful for your rescue. I am the Star Palace's External Affairs Enforcer, Ling Yuling.” While the person's voice was pleasant, it was neutral in pitch. This caused Han Li to frown and feel apprehension.

This person reminded him of the Harmonious Bond Sect's Young Master Tian from the Heavenly South Region's Devil Dao. But after some more thought, he felt that they were completely different. While Young Master Tian may have been extremely gorgeous, his mannerisms and voice were clearly [that of a man](#).

As for this Ling Yuling fellow, although “his” actions were that of

a man's, he held an indescribably effeminate aura. Moreover, with the deep magnetism in his voice, it was even more difficult to differentiate him as a man or woman.

“I am Han Li. My previous actions took but a slight effort. Had they not forced my hand, I wouldn't have attacked them.” Although he still felt shocked, he didn't reveal any hint of it on his face.

“Regardless, I am still very grateful towards you.” Ling Yuling smiled sweetly, casually producing a flirtatious charm.

Han Li felt his heart coldly tremble. As he still didn't know whether or not he was a man or a woman, he could only turn a blind eye toward Ling Yuling's beauty.

Ling Yuling retrieved his smile with eyes flickering in thought. He then solemnly said, “Is the reason why Fellow Daoist is in a hurry because he wishes to go to Heavenly Star City? The city should've already been locked down, and it would be quite difficult to enter. If Fellow Daoist is willing, I would be happy to take you into the city as compensation for your rescue.”

When Ling Yuling said this, Han Li felt somewhat surprised. But after some thought, he realized that he had already displayed his lack of association with the Starfall Coalition when he killed two of their cultivators.

As such, Ling Yuling took the initiative to make him an offer he couldn't refuse. Han Li slowly replied with a bright expression, “My cave residence was setup in Heavenly Star City, and I was in a hurry to return because of it. I must thank Fellow Daoist Ling for the trouble. Else, I may have been unable to enter the city.”

Ling Yuling beamingly smiled in response with bright, seductive eyes. “You're too kind. Since Fellow Daoist was able slay those two without hesitation, you naturally won't need any identification to enter the city. Our Star Palace welcomes you! However, those two weren't the only cultivators in pursuit of me, nor were they the

strongest. We had best hurry on our way.”

Han Li remained silent and nodded in response. The two then flew off towards Heaven Star City as streaks of light.

Along the way, Han Li curiously examined the other cultivator.

As Ling Yuling’s white clothes were slightly loose, Han Li wasn’t able to make out any female or male characteristics from the outside. Upon closer inspection, he discovered that Ling Yuling didn’t have a protrusion from his throat. However, this wasn’t enough to to definitely prove that he was a woman. To the best of his knowledge, there were a few peculiar cultivation arts that reversed one’s Yin and Yang, altering portions of one’s gender characteristics.

‘This person wouldn’t be cultivating such a technique, right?’ Han Li strangely thought.

Having noticed Han Li’s gaze, the beautiful person charmingly smiled towards Han Li, causing him to turn his head away in embarrassment.

“Fellow Daoist possesses two ancient treasures, and seems to be favored by the Heavens. Although I’ve had the fortune to see many magic treasures, I’ve never seen one with abilities such as your copper bands. I wonder what are their origins.” As Ling Yuling flew in a streak of light, he casually mentioned Han Li’s ancient treasures for some reason.

Han Li replied vaguely, “It’s nothing. I have merely had more opportunities than ordinary cultivators.” There was no way he would so easily divulge the truth.

“Hehe, but Fellow Daoist did kill two similar grade cultivators by himself and can’t possibly be a common character. Would you be interested in joining our Star Palace? I can give you a recommendation.” Seeing that Han Li didn’t want to answer, he didn’t push the issue and casually changed the subject to recruiting

him instead.

When Han Li heard this, he couldn't help but frown. This Ling Yuling was quite difficult to handle. They had yet to arrive at the city and he'd already started to raise some serious questions. Any cultivators that joined the Star Palace now would become cannon fodder, but if he refused, would he still be granted access into the city? His own words would ensnare him.

After a moment of thought, Han Li sighed and spoke with deliberation, "Although I've looked up to the Star Palace for quite some time, the Exquisite Sound Sect has treated me exceptionally well. I'm afraid I cannot leave my post as the Exquisite Sound Sect's guest elder in the coming years. I am truly sorry!" Han Li shamelessly used the Exquisite Sound Sect as an excuse to refuse.

"It is no matter. I feel much admiration towards Fellow Daoist Han's exceptional loyalty. However, our Star Palace will always be willing to welcome individuals such as yourself into our ranks." Ling Yuling didn't reveal any dissatisfaction at Han Li's tactful refusal. Instead, he faintly smiled and started to chat with Han Li about a few hidden rumors and interesting stories of the Scattered Star Seas. He tactfully avoided re-mentioning any matters pertaining to the Star Palace and Starfall Coalition.

Han Li was quite happy at Lin Yuling's quick change in attitude, allowing him some time to relax.

As they idly chatted on their way, they eventually spotted Heavenly Star City and rejoiced. But before they managed to get close to the island, a squad of five cultivators appeared before them from seemingly out of nowhere.

Their leader was a sallow-faced middle-aged early Core Formation cultivator. The other four cultivators were all at Foundation Establishment.

"We pay respects to Enforcer Ling!" Upon recognizing Ling Yuling, the four Foundation Establishment cultivators flew

forwards and respectfully saluted him.

It seemed this androgynous person held quite the reputation in the Star Palace.

The sallow-faced cultivator revealed pleasant surprise and asked, “Junior Martial Brother Ling, are you alright? Senior Martial Brother was quite worried upon hearing that Southclear Island had been ambushed. Hm? Who might this Fellow Daoist be?” The sallow-faced cultivator then turned his sights on Han Li and suspiciously examined him.

Ling Yuling spoke with a serene expression, “I was pursued by two Starfall Coalition cultivators along the way, but thankfully, Fellow Daoist Han came to my rescue. As Fellow Daoist Han’s cave residence was established in Heavenly Star City, I’ve brought him back here. There should be no problem in allowing Fellow Daoist Han into the city, yes?”

Not knowing whether it was due to fatigue from the rush to the city or some internal injuries, Han Li saw that Ling Yuling’s face had grown somewhat pale, causing him to appear somewhat fragile.

“Since he is someone who saved the life of Junior Martial Brother Ling, this will be no problem at all. Junior Martial Brother Ling, are you injured?”

When Han Li saw the sallow-faced cultivator’s extremely concerned expression, his heart stirred.

“It is nothing. Although they struck me with a magic treasure, I had the protection of my Heavenly Fragrance Chain, and didn’t suffer much damage.” Ling Yuling’s beautiful face faintly blushed, but his expression still remained calm.

After a moment of hesitation, the sallow-faced man took a small bottle from his body and politely passed it over to him, “I have a Heaven Spirit Pill that was refined from a secret formula. Junior

Martial Brother Ling, please take it and prevent any lasting damage to your vital energies.”

When Ling Yuling saw this, his expression sank as if he were about to become angry. But he soon thought of something and instead smiled with passionate eyes, saying, “Then Junior Marital Brother must thank Senior Martial Brother for the medicine. I must first head into the palace and report on Southclear Island. I’m afraid I must ask Senior Marital Brother to help Fellow Daoist Han into the city. As he is my saviour, Senior Martial Brother must treat him properly.” Ling Yuling then smiled, taking the bottle with his slim, flawless hand in a very graceful manner. In that moment, it appeared he was undoubtedly a woman.

The sallow-faced cultivator revealed excitement as if he were honored to hear Ling Yuling’s pleasant words. “It is not a problem. Since Elder Wang is on duty, he won’t make things difficult for Junior Martial Brother,” he then slapped his chest and pledged, “Please don’t hesitate to leave Fellow Daoist Han with me.”

When Han Li saw this, a strange expression flickered from his eyes.

Was this person a woman or not?! Why else would the sallow-faced man appear so infatuated with Ling Yuling?

Han Li’s heart was in great turbulence.

Note: Since there are no gender neutral singular pronouns in English, Ling Yuling will be addressed as ‘he’, despite having an indeterminate gender.

Chapter 506: Requirements for Access

For a long while, the sallow-faced cultivator gazed in the direction that Ling Yuling had flown off in. He eventually turned his gaze back to Han Li and calmly said, “Although Fellow Daoist did assist Junior Martial Brother Ling, there are still a few questions I must ask you. As these are trying times, I hope Fellow Daoist will cooperate!”

Han Li calmly replied, “If Fellow Daoist has any questions, please don’t hesitate to ask.”

The sallow-faced cultivator nodded his head and said, “Good. First, tell me your identity. I will be verifying whether or not it is true.”

Han Li smiled upon hearing this. “I am an elder of the Exquisite Sound Sect. This is my badge, and this is the restriction control medallion to my cave residence in the city. I’m sure that Fellow Daoist will know whether it is genuine or fake.”

“Exquisite Sound Sect? Take a look and see if the Exquisite Sound Sect has an elder named Han.” The sallow-faced cultivator bluntly took both of the medallions, and gave an order to those behind him without turning his head.

“Yes!” When the dainty female cultivator heard him, she hastily rummaged through her storage pouch before taking out a jade slip and immersing her spiritual sense within it. Afterwards, she glanced at Han Li several times before speaking with a respectful tone, “Enforcer Zhao, the Exquisite Sound Sect does have an elder named Han Li and his appearance is exactly the same as is recorded.”

When the sallow-faced cultivator heard this, he expressionlessly nodded his head, “Oh! These two medallions are genuine as well. There seems to be no problem with your identity!”

The sallow-faced cultivator tossed the medallions back to Han Li, “Alright, you four continue on your patrol. I will be bringing this Fellow Daoist into the city.”

The four behind him shouted in acknowledgement, “Yes!”

Afterwards, the sallow faced cultivator wordlessly beckoned to Han Li and flew off toward Heavenly Star City. Han Li closely flew after him as a streak of azure light.

Not long after, the sallow-faced cultivator brought Han Li to the high walls of the city before flying up towards a city gate.

Although there was no further interrogation, Han Li released his spiritual sense to examine his surroundings, discovering at least six hidden cultivators along the way. Although they were mostly Foundation Establishment cultivators, there were two Core Formation cultivators that remained unseen.

Although his face remained calm, his heart trembled. It seemed the attack on Southclear Island had prompted Heavenly Star City to introduce greatly increased security as he had expected. Had he not been given a referral, he feared it wouldn’t have been an easy task to enter the city.

The city gates appeared quite desolate. Apart from the tens of white clothed cultivators standing guard outside of it, there was no one else present. In addition, as Han Li came closer to the city, he discovered that the walls and the gate were glowing with faint white light as if they were under the effects of a restriction.

After the sallow-faced cultivator landed on the gate, he headed straight towards an old man that was reclining in a bamboo chair. He had a short beard and whiskers all over his face.

He saluted the old man and spoke with a respectful tone, “Enforcer Yu! This is the Exquisite Sound Sect’s Elder Han. I’ve already inspected his identity and command medallion, and I’ve found no problems. I must trouble Enforcer Yu to explain the

procedure for entering the city. I cannot stay much longer as I must continue on my patrol.”

Han Li’s gaze fell onto the old man and he immediately put his guard up. It was no wonder that the sallow-faced cultivator was so polite to him. He was a mid Core Formation cultivator.

The old man slowly opened his eyes as if he were still half asleep, “Exquisite Sound Sect?”

After a moment of hesitation, he somewhat reluctantly added on, “That’s right, and he righteously assisted Junior Martial Brother Ling as well.”

A cold glint flickered in the old man’s eyes, faintly revealing a spirited energy before it immediately disappeared. Then with a powerless voice, he lazily said, “Oh, that is strange. Alright, I understand. Fellow Daoist Zhao may return.”

The sallow-faced cultivator seemed to not mind the old man’s mannerisms and saluted him before flying off, paying Han Li not the slightest heed.

Han Li calmly stood in place and silently looked at the old man.

“I’ve seen the Exquisite Sound Sect’s Young Girl Violet Spirit many times before. She truly is a fine beauty. I’ve heard of you, Exquisite Sound Sect Elder, but unfortunately, I’ve never had the chance to meet you before. It seems from your youthful appearance, that you also cultivate a technique that halts the aging of your appearance, much like our Fellow Daoist Ling. To the best of my knowledge, these cultivation techniques are all extreme Yin in nature. There are little benefits if a man were to cultivate it.”

With serene calm, Han Li asked, “Do your words mean that Fellow Daoist Ling is a man? As for my appearance, that is the result of a Face Setting Pill that I took long ago, not a cultivation technique.”

The old man let out a muffled chuckle before speaking with an

impressive lack of speed, “Even our Star Palace is unsure of whether Fellow Daoist Ling is a male or female, let alone me. However, it is undoubtable that he cultivates a technique that halts his appearance. Haha, it seems Fellow Daoist Han’s luck is quite good to come across an opportunity to consume a rare medicine pill.” Han Li felt astonished.

The old man continued, “Alright, I won’t dwell on the matter. Since your identity has already been examined, this old man won’t bother to do so. However, as the times are unordinary, the rules will be as well. Fellow Daoist, listen well to what I have to say.”

Han Li raised his eyebrows and remained silent.

The old man’s expression grew sullen and he said with an icy tone, “Right now, Fellow Daoist has two options. You can join the Star Palace for the time being if you are willing to assist us in our fight. In this case, your movements will be unrestrained within the city. And each time you carry out any missions, you will be heavily rewarded. There is no way we would allow anyone’s efforts to be in vain. If you are unwilling to fight in the war and wish to stay idly in the city, we won’t force you to fight, but as the city is currently under martial law, no one is allowed to casually leave their residence unless it is during a specified time. Our enforcement squads in the city will slay anyone who does not follow these rules. Fellow Daoist Han can now tell me his choice.”

A strange expression flickered from Han Li’s eyes. For a time, he silently sunk into contemplation.

When the old man saw this, he didn’t rush Han Li. He only narrowed his eyes, revealing a slightly crossed expression.

After muttering to himself for a moment, Han Li solemnly asked, “After I enter the city, would I be able to use the Outer Star Seas transportation formation?”

“Originally, it would’ve been fine so long as you paid the spirit stone toll. However, it will no longer do. If you wish to go to the

Outer Star Seas, you will have to do something for us.” The old man didn’t appear surprised as if he had already anticipated Han Li’s question.

Although Han Li already guessed what it would be, he still frowned and asked, “What would that be?”

The old man faintly smiled, and lightly said, “It’s quite simple! As soon as the battle starts, you will get an assignment from the Star Palace to eliminate a Starfall Coalition cultivator at the same rank of cultivation as yourself.” His smile seemed to resemble a smirk.

Having heard this, Han Li bitterly laughed in his mind. It seems the upper echelons of the Star Palace intended to coerce cultivators that wished to leave the city. Even if the Star Palace couldn’t control them, they would be required to spill the blood of Starfall Coalition cultivators. On the one hand, it would weaken the might of the Starfall Coalition. On the other, it would prevent those cultivators from ever joining the enemy.

Using a single breath, Han Li quickly said, “I’ve already killed similar ranked cultivators on my way back with Fellow Daoist Ling. Does that count?”

“You’ve already killed one?” The old man appeared quite moved.

“That’s right,” Han Li nodded his head without hesitation.

“Unfortunately, that won’t count. It must happen after the battle has started. There is no point if you kill any of them beforehand.”

Han Li stroked his chin and pensively asked, “When does Fellow Daoist reckon that the battle will break out?”

The old man was slightly surprised by Han Li’s question and took another look at Han Li before calmly replying, “It should be as soon as the next few days, I imagine. The Starfall Coalition don’t plan on attacking the inner island, but rather aim to take over Heavenly Star City in an ambush in the quickest time possible!”

Without further deliberation, Han Li calmly said, “I will enlist.

I'll be wanting to use the Outer Star Seas transportation formation after I kill a cultivator of the same rank."

The old man patted down his body before fishing out a sparkling yellow ring. He then indifferently handed it over to Han Li and said, "Good! Put this ring on. It represents that for the time being, you will be a member of the Star Palace. When the battle comes, the ring will give you an assignment."

Chapter 507: Light in the Darkest Hour

Han Li received the ring and put it on without hesitation.

The old man smiled and said, “Good, you can now enter the city. During the day, there will be free movement, but there is an enforced curfew at night. When the battle starts, the ring will notify you. You can wait in your cave residence until then.” After he finished speaking, he slowly closed his eyes once more and appeared to drift off.

After taking a deep glance at the old man, Han Li entered the city.

Not only were the streets of the city desolate, but he only occasionally caught glimpses of other cultivators in flight. The empty city made for dreary scenery.

Han Li’s expression remained calm, but he inwardly rejoiced. From the apparent circumstances, the city market must certainly have been shut down. Had he not taken the time to make his preparations in Southclear Island, he would’ve surely suffered quite the headache.

Han Li softly chuckled before flying through the air towards his cave residence on Sage Mountain.

As he passed by the market city, Han Li glanced down to find that all the shops were closed as he had expected. There wasn’t a single person in sight. Han Li lightly shook his head and quickly flew towards the thirty-ninth layer of Sage Mountain.

Upon entering Sage Mountain, Han Li keenly felt that the security on the mountain was far denser than the outer city. He was able to notice over ten different ripples through the air with his spiritual sense alone. But with the yellow ring on hand, the ripples in the air made way for Han Li. Despite all of this, there were no guards who appeared to question Han Li.

But what made Han Li frown was the late Core Formation cultivator that swept his spiritual sense past him.

Han Li feigned ignorance of this as he flew towards his cave residence. When he arrived, he examined the restrictions to find that nothing had been changed.

However, Han Li blankly stood outside the restrictions for a moment before letting out a sigh. He hadn't been gone for long, but he had encountered many close brushes with death, and now, he had no choice but to discard his cave residence of nearly a hundred years. This caused Han Li to feel somewhat sentimental.

He used his restriction control medallion to open the restrictions and slowly walked in, finding that everything was the same as he had left it.

Han Li first attended to the most important matter at hand, the Gold Devouring Beetles. After making certain that the Gold Devouring Beetles were sound, Han Li felt genuinely relieved. He immediately placed all of them in a spirit beast pouch that he had prepared earlier, and turned towards his medicine garden and placed everything into his storage pouch.

After this, Han Li decided to relax for the time being and slowly walked to the bedroom. He laid down on the bed and started to ponder about his plans for the future.

He was required to kill a Starfall Coalition cultivator of the same rank as him if he wanted to use the transportation formation to the Outer Star Seas. While this condition wasn't difficult for him to fulfill, Han Li was worried that before the battle started, the Star Palace would somehow learn that the Heavenvoid Cauldron had fallen into his hands. After all, he had no way of knowing when those Nascent Soul eccentrics would leave Heavenvoid Hall. If one of those old eccentrics were to divulge this information, it would be disastrous for him.

In addition to this, he had other misgivings. It was possible that

after he fulfilled their condition, the upper echelon of the Star Palace would make up a frivolous reason to shamelessly deny him access to the transportation formation.

After all, what could the recruited cultivators possibly do, even if the Star Palace reneged on their agreement?

Although he had calmly agreed to the Star Palace's agreement at the entrance, he never intended on sincerely awaiting the Star Palace's orders.

He prepared to explore the surroundings of the transportation formation, and see whether or not he could stealthily use it. If the security was lacking, he would seize the first opportunity to use it.

As for whether or not he offended the colossal Star Palace, he didn't care in the least. In the end, he would still be pursued by those Nascent Soul eccentrics.

With those reassuring thoughts in mind, Han Li dozed off to sleep. The numerous surprises on the past excursions had left Han Li quite fatigued.

On the next day, Han Li awoke with roused spirits.

He slowly walked out from the cave residence underneath a clear and bright sky, before flying into the air and examining his surroundings.

Although there weren't as many cultivators outside compared to during peacetime, it was completely different from yesterday. It seemed that this was the time where free movement was allowed.

Han Li first flew around his surroundings in a circle. After seeing that no one was monitoring him or paying any attention, he shot towards the fiftieth floor of Sage Mountain without any hesitation.

Security was tighter as he went deeper into the mountain. Soon, Han Li arrived above the Starry Sky Palace, where the transportation formation was located. However, he merely passed over it. Instead, he pretended to visit another hall instead, and

used that short instance to quietly sweep his spiritual sense over the hall.

It went quite smoothly. The hall was nearly entirely devoid of any obstructions, but when he swept his spiritual sense past the inner portion of the building, he was blocked by a blue-yellow restriction. Fortunately, Han Li noticed it quite quickly and was able to retrieve his spiritual sense before touching the restriction.

His expression then sank. Although he reckoned he was able to force his spiritual sense past the restriction, it would alert any of the cultivators inside the hall. There was no way he would willingly do something so foolish.

At that moment, he unconsciously frowned.

Because of the restriction, Han Li was neither able to see the quantity of cultivators within the inner halls nor their level of cultivation. However, there was no reason for any Nascent Soul cultivators to appear there. In the most extreme case, there would only be late Core Formation cultivators present. After all, the Starry Sky Palace didn't hold any critical value towards the Star Palace's upper echelon.

After flying a far enough distance, Han Li flew in a circle and returned along a slightly different path.

When Han Li was on his way back, he indignantly released his spiritual sense to see whether or not there was a gap in the restrictions. While his exploration found no faults in the restrictions, he did hear a raspy voice.

"Fellow Daoist Zhang, how were the terms? Three thousand spirit stones per person on the transportation formation. This is the greatest amount we could offer."

When Han Li heard this, his heart began to stir. His sights quickly fell onto two cultivators beneath him, and he immediately slowed down.

One of the cultivators was a dark-skinned, middle-aged man while the other was a shriveled man with a sickly appearance. Both of them were mid Foundation Establishment cultivators. The one who had nervously spoken was the dark-skinned man.

The two were being careful, whispering at a place where no one else was present. But that didn't matter when Han Li's enormous spiritual sense enveloped them; he could hear everything they said with perfect clarity.

"Shh! Be careful. Let's talk about this through voice transmission." The shriveled man nervously glanced around, but Han Li managed to perceptively hide himself in an instant, entering a state of Qi restraint. At that same moment, Han Li's spiritual sense was immediately withdrawn from other areas and was completely focused on the two in preparation of eavesdropping on their voice transmissions.

As Han Li's spiritual sense far surpassed theirs, he was able to do this with the utmost secrecy. Were other Core Formation cultivators to attempt this, they would require an appropriate top grade secret technique to accomplish the same result.

"Although we may be distant relatives, it is extremely dangerous to secretly release people into the Outer Star Seas. He said that anything less than five thousand spirit stones per person, and he will have to decline. And this is considering that the Star Palace doesn't care about us Foundation Establishment cultivators. Were a Core Formation cultivator to hand over even more spirit stones, he definitely wouldn't be allowed through."

With an unsightly expression, the dark-skinned man roared, "Five thousand!? Are we filled with money! How are rogue Foundation Establishment cultivators supposed to come up with that many spirit stones!?" Even while outraged, he had still remembered to use voice transmissions.

The shriveled cultivator sighed and attempted to placate him, "It

is far too dangerous to continue to live within the Inner Star Seas. Us rogue cultivators could fall victim to any calamity that appears. When that happens, our lives will be forfeit; what use will spirit stones have then? After all, we all reckon that the forces of the Star Palace are nearly equal to that of the Starfall Coalition. It is very likely the war will last several years if not several tens of years. I don't want to spend my days flying around while fleeing and hiding in fear. As for spirit stones, we all possess no small amount of rare materials we've been keeping in reserve. We should be able to use them to pay the remaining amount of spirit stones. In that manner, they would be willing to agree and give us face."

"Impossible! Are we going to pour out our entire fortunes to go to the Outer Star Seas? Absurd!" The dark-faced man shook his head in a miserly fashion.

The shriveled man was also distressed and bitterly said, "Fine, let's go back and see what the others think."

Chapter 508: Deciding on a Plan

After that was said, their conversation ended with sullen expressions as they quickly flew down Sage Mountain on their magic tools.

Han Li didn't closely follow after them as it would've been too obvious. Instead, he coiled a sliver of spiritual sense around the shriveled man and watched them fly off with a detached expression before following them from a distance.

The two of them were quite slow compared to Han Li. After two hours, they finally reached the fourth layer of Sage Mountain and entered an extremely ordinary courtyard residence.

Soon after, Han Li appeared above the residence.

The scenery here was quite serene. In addition to a few other similar residences in the distance, there was also a small green forest of bamboo nearby.

Han Li's eyes became bright when he gazed at the residence. It was unremarkable, but there was a small Flowing Water Formation placed outside. Although it would prove to be of little use against any cultivators that truly wished to intrude, it would allow for an early warning.

However, the formation spell was of little use against Han Li, a Core Formation cultivator who possessed some understanding towards formation spells. Han Li had complete confidence he could slip in without alerting its owner. In fact, that was precisely what he planned to do.

His hands formed an incantation gesture before his figured distorted, disappearing in a haze of azure light. Not long after, Han Li reappeared in the courtyard without a sound. As his magic power had been completely restrained from circulating, there was no way a Core Formation cultivator could detect Han Li, let alone a

Foundation Establishment cultivator.

The reason why Han Li was so careful was because he had feared there was a Core Formation cultivator here. Were that not the case, he would've merely used a common concealment technique.

Han Li motionlessly stood at the center of the courtyard and slowly released his spiritual sense around him, enveloping the entire courtyard. Afterwards, slight surprise appeared on his face as he stared in the direction of a side wing.

He clearly felt that the other rooms were empty. Only the room in the side wing had any cultivators, seven to be exact.

The seven cultivators consisted of five men and two woman; the shriveled man and the dark-skinned middle-aged man were amongst them. The one who possessed the highest cultivation was a large hook-nosed, embroidered-robed man who possessed a spirited gaze.

Apart from his nose, he had a grand and imposing appearance. He had progressed to the peak of late Foundation Establishment and had already entered the false core stage. He was already at the point where he should be undergoing preparations for Core Formation.

As for the rest, they were at mid Foundation Establishment stage.

This was to be expected. One must require that cultivation at the very least if they wished to head to the Outer Star Seas.

However, perhaps due to what they had discussed before, they were all silent with sullen expressions. Not a word was being said in the room.

Han Li wasn't impatient. He quietly stood in place and waited. He was confident that their following chat was sure to give him some useful information and bring him closer to being able to form a plan.

After the time it took to finish a cup of tea, a middle-aged woman

lost her patience and anxiously said, “Brother Yi, Fellow Daoist Huang had brought back word that they want five thousand spirit stones per person before allowing us to teleport to the Outer Star Seas. In that case, we would be fairly relieved of our assignments to the Star Palace after handing over the spirit stones. What does Brother Yi think? After all, once the battle occurs, it will be too late to leave.”

The pale-skinned middle-aged woman that sat at her side scowled and spoke with a hostile tone, “Lady Liu, from your tone, you seem quite willing to let go of your spirit stones. But did you not think that your fellow Daoists aren’t able to casually spend such an amount? My husband and I wouldn’t be able to produce that sum even with all of our possessions. Could it be that Fellow Daoist wishes to leave alone?”

When the other woman heard her, she revealed a trace of annoyance and asked, “When did I say that I was going alone? How about we just ask Brother Yi? You are very experienced and have the highest cultivation among us. Surely you can give us a proper analysis of the pros and cons.”

The embroidered-robed man said, “Alright, there is no need for you two to continue. Fellow Daoist Liu cannot use the transportation formation alone. The Outer Star Seas isn’t a place where a lone Formation Establishment Cultivator can roam around. It is only when we go together that we will be able to survive. If we’re lucky, we’ll manage to kill a few spirit beasts and use their cores to refine medicine pills. In addition, we won’t be tasked with killing a cultivator of a similar grade during the battle. Even Core Formation cultivators would find it difficult to preserve their lives during the fray, let alone us low grade cultivators. Moreover, there is also the worry of the Star Palace turning back on their word.”

“That’s impossible! The Star Palace seems to have never done such unjust actions. Fellow Daoist Yi, aren’t you being overly

suspicious?” The burly youth said. Although his age was young, he had a mature aura.

“Although the possibility is low, it is still possible. This isn’t a period where the Star Palace is the sole superpower. If the Star Palace feels it is in danger, it will do as it wants without any fear of the consequences. Such is the right of the powerful! Humph!” The large, embroidered-robed man’s face twitched before he disdainfully snorted. He seemed to hold quite some understanding of great powers.

After that was said, everyone in the room remained silent as they sunk into thought.

The large man then slowly continued, “Therefore, the optimal choice would be to use spirit stones to preserve our lives. If we were to truly participate in the battle, it is quite possible that we would all perish. And even if some of us were to survive and head to the Outer Star Seas, survival would be out of the question from a lack of strength. It would only be another path to disaster.”

“However, it costs so many spirit stones...”

When the dark-skinned middle-aged man spoke with a distressed expression, the embroidered-robe cultivator interrupted him with an icy expression, “What use are spirit stones if you’re dead? Besides, we’ll be able to make up for our losses by hunting down a few high grade demon beasts in the Outer Star Seas. What is most important at the moment is using the transportation formation.”

The dark-skinned cultivator seemed quite scared of the large man and immediately grew silent at his rebuke.

“As for the lack of spirit stones, take out as many as you can. Let’s see whether or not they will be flexible. If it won’t do, then we’ll take out our excess spirit stones and lend them to each other for the time being. After we teleport to the Outer Star Seas, the debts will be paid back with interest.” The large man imposingly gazed at the more destitute cultivators as he spoke as if having

already decided for them.

The six glanced at each other in discomfort, but they all reluctantly accepted his command.

The large man revealed slight satisfaction and turned towards the shriveled man. He said with an imposing tone, "Fellow Daoist Zhang, I must trouble you to make another trip tomorrow, and see if they are willing to take a lesser price. If it is impossible, then we will agree to those conditions. However, we must leave by the day after tomorrow; there cannot be any delays. It will all be meaningless unless we can leave before the battle erupts."

The shriveled man repeatedly agreed. Afterwards, a lively discussion began to erupt in the room over the specific details.

As Han Li stood outside the room, he was able to hear the entirety of their discussion with perfect clarity. He couldn't stop himself from mysteriously smiling. Then with a flash of azure light, he disappeared without a trace.

On the next day, the shriveled man left the residence and headed towards the Starry Sky Palace, completely unaware of the person following him from above.

When Han Li followed him into the vicinity of the Starry Sky Palace, he cautiously slipped away into a nearby building.

Han Li rubbed his nose and then quietly waited inside the building.

About an hour later, the shriveled man sneakily emerged from the building with a trace of excitement betrayed on his face. Afterwards, Han Li followed him back to the residence.

However, something unexpected had occurred before his eyes.

Before entering the residence, the shriveled man's excitement completely disappeared and was exchanged with a miserable expression.

When Han Li saw this, he frowned. With chin in hand, his mind began to ponder, “Could it be...”

Chapter 509: Infiltration

On the morning of the third day, underneath the bright skies, the group of Foundation Establishment cultivators slipped out of their residence with utmost stealth and headed towards the Starry Sky Palace.

As the enforced curfew had just ended, there were only a few cultivators roaming through the early morning sky. Hence, the seven were even more careful. Each of them nervously went along their way with lowered heads. However, the embroidered-robed man in the lead vigilantly examined his surroundings as they flew.

The journey to Starry Sky Palace was very smooth. Nothing happened to them as they flew to the forty-ninth floor of Sage Mountain. When they arrived at the Starry Sky Palace, their expressions were relaxed and filled with relief.

But at that moment, the embroidered-robed man in front suddenly stopped in the air with a shocked expression. He raised his arm with a solemn expression, performing a strange hand gesture. When the others behind him saw this, they abruptly halted and became vigilant.

The embroidered-robed man stared at an empty location and spoke with a heavy tone, "For what reason has Fellow Daoist blocked our path?" At that same moment, he began to reach for the storage pouch at his waist.

The empty area in front of them flashed with azure light to reveal an azure-clothed cultivator standing there with his hands behind his back. He slowly spoke with a hoarse voice, "Hehe, there is no need for you Fellow Daoists to be afraid. Although I've been waiting just for you, I mean no harm. I merely have something to request of you."

Once the party clearly felt his cultivation, they were filled with alarm and surged with wariness.

The man was also a peak Foundation Establishment cultivator at false core stage.

With a cold glint flashing from his eyes, the embroidered-robed man calmly asked, “What is your esteemed name, Fellow Daoist? How can we help you?”

The azure-clothed man casually said something that made the seven cultivators pale, “My name is Crooked Soul, a mere vagrant cultivator. Aren’t you heading to the Starry Sky Palace? Could you bring me along? I also wish to head to the Outer Star Seas.”

When the embroidered-robed man heard him, his expression fluctuated. He was silent for a moment before he widely smiled and said, “So it’s Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul, but what do you mean by Starry Sky Palace and the Outer Star Seas? Our group is only going to attend to a few personal matters, and we just happened to pass here along the way. We have no business with the Starry Sky Palace. Fellow Daoist is mistaken.” The embroidered-robed man came to a decision that regardless of this Crooked Soul’s intention or how he managed to find out about their plans, there was absolutely no way he would easily agree.

The others remained silent as well as if they were leaving the matter entirely up to the large man.

‘Crooked Soul’ chuckled and casually said, “There is no need for Fellow Daoist Yi to be so suspicious. Since I’ve already arrived here, how could I be fooled just like that?”

The embroidered-robed man’s heart trembled and he snorted, “Humph! So it seems you know my identity and have a clear understanding of our plans.” He then unconsciously clutched his storage pouch with veins protruding from his hands.

Having received an unknown command, the other cultivators suddenly dispersed in great coordination and surrounded the azure-clothed man.

The azure-clothed man ignored their movements and spoke with great leisure, “You don’t want to try and kill me. I don’t mean to boast, but with my cultivation, you wouldn’t be able to kill me quickly. If I were to yell and call for the Star Palace, I wonder what would happen?”

After that was said, the group of cultivators glanced at each other before turning their gazes to the large, embroidered-robed man.

The large man’s expression became unsightly. Although he had yet to reach Core Formation, he had always boasted of his exceptional shrewdness making him a menace among Foundation Establishment cultivators. However, he clearly understood that the man’s threats were no joke.

After a moment of deliberation, he could only suppress his anger and coldly ask, “What does Fellow Daoist want us to help you with. We’ve already said that we would take only seven people. Moreover, the transportation formation can only take seven cultivators at a time. They would certainly refuse if we were to add another.”

The azure-clothed man smiled, “Be at ease, I won’t make things hard for you. So long as I enter the hall, I’ll have my own methods for persuading them. If an agreement can’t be reached, I will neither force the issue nor ruin your fortuitous affair.”

“Only that?” The large man frowned and wore a trace of doubt.

“Only that!” The azure-clothed man spoke with certainty.

The large man muttered to himself for a moment before eventually gritting his teeth, “Fine, if it’s only to give you an introduction, then we’re willing to agree, if only barely.”

With a calm expression as if having anticipated the large man’s concession, the azure-robed man saluted and said, “Then I must give you my thanks!”

The shriveled man raised his head to look at the sky and

anxiously urged, "Since Fellow Daoist wishes to head to the Starry Sky Palace, let us go quickly. We're already running late. They may become impatient."

The azure-clothed man glanced at the shriveled man in silence, but the embroidered-robed man wordlessly raised his hand and they continue on their way.

They moved in a formation that kept the azure-robed cultivator at their center. It seemed they were quite wary of him. Still, the azure-clothed cultivator calmly followed after them. Of course, this azure-clothed cultivator was actually Han Li. He had restrained his magic power fluctuations to the level of a peak Foundation Establishment cultivator and had disguised his appearance.

The remaining distance from the Starry Sky Hall wasn't long. After only a short moment, the party arrived in front of the Starry Sky Palace. At that moment, the shriveled man suddenly increased in speed and shot forward, arriving at the hall first.

The embroidered-robed man and the others didn't find this odd in the slightest. After all, the shriveled man was the one who had relations with the Starry Sky Palace in the first place. Now that they arrived, it was only natural that he led the way, lest any misunderstandings occur.

After entering, the party tried their hardest to maintain a calm expression, but a trace of apprehension was betrayed on their faces. Having entered the Starry Sky Palace, their lives were now in the hands of the other party.

However, everything seemed to be going as expected. The restrictions that should've been there were absent, and it seemed the managers of the palace had disabled them ahead of time.

When Han Li saw this, a strange expression momentarily appeared on his face.

But what comforted the party the most was the sight of two white-clothed Star Palace Core Formation cultivators waiting for them in the hall with the transportation formations.

When the shriveled man saw the two, he immediately broke into a smile and walked forward several steps to respectfully greet them, “Senior Gu, Senior Qian, we’ve arrived. Have you finished the preparations on your end?”

Among the two, the bald old man nodded his head, slowly saying, “We’re ready on our side. Hand over the spirit stones, and we’ll give each person a displacement talisman. You can leave as soon as soon as possible, but the spirit stones had better not be short.”

The embroidered-robed man stepped forward and respectfully said, “Be at ease, Senior, we’ve brought along the agreed amount of spirit stones.”

The bald old man examined him several times before speaking with a polite tone, “So, you’re Fellow Daoist Yi. As expected, your cultivation is exceptional!” But when his sights fell upon Han Li, his expression sunk.

The bald old man’s expression became gloomy and his voice was filled with suspicion, “Didn’t we agree that it’s supposed to be seven? Why is there another person here? This Fellow Daoist also seems to be at the false core stage. May I know who you are?”

“He’s...” The embroidered-robed man bitterly smiled, wanting to give an explanation.

Han Li smiled and interrupted the large man, “I am Crooked Soul, a vagrant cultivator that also wishes to head to the Outer Star Seas. I’ve heard that Fellow Daoist Yi and the others had a connection, and chose to deliberately seek them out. I hope you two Seniors don’t take offence. If these Seniors are willing to accomodate me, I am willing to pay double their rate for the use of the transportation formation.”

“Double?” The bald old man was shocked for a moment before turning his head to look at the scholarly middle-aged cultivator at his side.

The middle-aged man frowned and slowly said, “Even if you pay double, the largest number of people that can be sent in a single teleportation is seven. Also we can only use the transportation formation once, so it is impossible to allow a teleportation for your use alone. Otherwise, it will be difficult to conceal our activities from the upper echelon.”

“Junior has considered that, so he won’t make it difficult for Senior,” Han Li smiled and suddenly turned to the side, speaking without a trace of politeness, “Therefore, how about Fellow Daoist temporarily hand over his spot?”

Chapter 510: Blackmail

The person Han Li was requesting a spot from was the shriveled man.

“What did you say?” Alarm flickered across the shriveled man’s face, soon to be replaced with anger.

The others glanced at each other, not knowing what Han Li intended.

Han Li calmly said, “Be at ease, Fellow Daoist, I won’t allow you to do this in vain. I have two grade five demon beast cores. Take it as payment for your spot. Surely Fellow Daoist won’t turn his back on me.” He then searched his robes and took two shining blue globes out of nowhere. From their emitted spiritual Qi, they were genuine grade five demon cores.

The shriveled man looked at the two demon cores with a trace of greed, but he soon thought of something and coldly snorted, “Humph! Does your esteemed self think that I will give up my place for a measly two demon cores?”

Han Li didn’t grow angry. Instead, he strangely smiled and his lips trembled several times, sending several voice transmissions to him in everyone’s presence. The shriveled man suddenly paled after hearing them.

Han Li then spoke to him with a leisurely tone without using a voice transmission, “With this, there should be no way Fellow Daoist could possibly refuse this trade. Am I correct?”

When the shriveled man heard Han Li, his nervous face became lined with cold sweat. After fiercely glaring at Han Li for a moment, the shriveled man’s face twitched as he clenched his teeth and said, “Fine! Since Fellow Daoist can say that, I will hand over my spot to you!”

Those words came as a shock to the other six.

The embroidered-robed man's expression sank and he stared at the shriveled man. He coldly said, "Fellow Daoist Zhang, what are you saying? Didn't we say that we were going together? Why did you..."

The shriveled man bitterly laughed and helplessly said, "I am truly sorry, but I fear we must part for the time being. You should all go first. I will join you if there is another opportunity."

The embroidered man spoke no further, nor did the rest of the party. It was now apparent that something was being used against their Fellow Daoist Zhang in order to force him to relinquish his spot. Hence, there was no point in continuing the discussion. Fortunately, a lack of one person didn't make too much of a difference in their plans.

The bald old man frowned and imposingly glared at the shriveled man, "Humph! Who said you could exchange people as you wished."

"Senior Gu, I..." The shriveled man was startled and thought to mutter an explanation, but he couldn't come up with anything.

But at that moment, Han Li produced two jade boxes with a flick of his hand, tossing one each to the bald old man and the scholarly man at his side.

When the two saw the jade boxes, they unconsciously caught them and calmly gazed at Han Li.

Han Li spoke with a serene appearance, "The boxes contain two treasures that Junior unexpectedly acquired. Please take them Seniors."

The two gave each other a mutual glance with curiosity in their eyes. From their examination of the boxes, it seemed that they contained no tricks. They then carefully opened the boxes by a sliver to release several rays of red light.

The two unconsciously revealed pleasant surprise upon seeing

what was within.

With a moved expression, the scholarly man said, “Does Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul truly wish to hand these two treasures over to us?”

Han Li faintly smiled and said, “Junior understands that although the items are precious, they are of no use to him at his current cultivation. Junior wishes even more to head out to the Outer Star Seas so that he can continue his peaceful cultivation.”

The bald old man couldn’t contain his joy and without any discussion with his partner, he hurriedly agreed, “Hehe! Good. Since Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul has given us such a grand gift, we won’t be unreasonable. You can use the transportation formation with the other six.”

Although Cultivator Qian appeared unhappy, he was also tempted by the item in his hand and didn’t say anything in opposition.

This scene shook the hearts of the Foundation Establishment cultivators, causing them to feel a huge desire to see what those boxes contained. However, the boxes were quickly closed by the two Star Palace cultivators. As they didn’t dare to use their spiritual sense to pry, they were left helpless.

However, when the embroidered-robed man took another glance at the two jade boxes, a trace of amazement flickered in his eyes. Although he couldn’t see what the boxes contained, from what they had said, he couldn’t help but think of the words “magic treasure”. Could it be that this person had truly given them magic treasures? Despite being just a guess, he couldn’t help but feel amazed.

Before the embroidered-robed man could finish his thoughts, the two Star Palace cultivators turned around to the transportation formation behind them and began to chant an incantation with their hands grasping a white jade medallion.

The Foundation Establishment cultivators didn't see anything odd about this, but Han Li let out a long sigh of relief.

“Lucky... The transportation formation has a trick to it. Had I charged in without knowing this, I would find myself in a difficult situation. It seems taking out a few undesirable yet somewhat valuable magic tools was quite an incisive move.”

The jade boxes each contained a flying knife magic treasure that sparkled with red light. These two flying knives were taken from Hu Yue after the Bone Sage had killed him.

Although these magic treasures weren't particularly amazing, they were exceptionally precious to ordinary Core Formation cultivators.

Even if the magic treasure couldn't be linked to one's consciousness, it could be directly used at seventy percent of its strength without the need of investing a large amount of time or resources. This was something that ordinary Core Formation cultivators could only dream of acquiring.

Although many magic treasures have been passed down throughout the years, a majority of them had been destroyed in battle. Even with the remaining magic treasures, most of them would fall into the hands of Nascent Soul Cultivators or exceedingly powerful Core Formation cultivators. Though, they would occasionally fall into the hands of a few nameless cultivators and minor powers.

Huge superpowers like the Star Palace obviously acquired many magic treasures but conversely, they also had an exceedingly large number of Core Formation cultivators.

If these two early Core Formation cultivators didn't earn any merits, they wouldn't be bestowed any magic treasures. As such, they were wild with joy to find a magic treasure unexpectedly falling in their grasp. After refining them, their strength would receive a massive increase.

As such, the shriveled man could only obediently hand over his place. Han Li had a full grasp over the situation.

When Han Li saw the shriveled man's expression on his return to the residence, he grew suspicious and infiltrated his room. Although there didn't exist any magic techniques that could completely control a cultivator's consciousness, Han Li was able to put him into a half conscious daze. With a combination of bewitchment techniques along with his immense spiritual sense, he was able to force out the shriveled man's deepest thoughts.

Although the shriveled man only spouted out intermittent phrases during this state, Han Li ended up quite lucky, acquiring information that the shriveled man and the two Star Palace cultivators had deliberately raised the price to squeeze the other Foundation Establishment cultivators for all they had.

With this information to blackmail him along with the enticement of the two demon cores, the shriveled man meekly submitted to Han Li; his heart filled to the brim with apprehension to the point of near panic. He couldn't help but think, 'Did the Star Palace cultivators deliberately set me up?'

As the incantations reverberated throughout the hall, the transportation formation began to glow with white light. Following a clear ring, the white glow suddenly disappeared.

After seeing that the restriction had disappeared from the formation, the bald old man turned to the party of Formation Establishment cultivators and bluntly said, "Normally, these is another manager of the hall, but as luck would have it, he was sent to the Star Palace Hall to handle emerging affairs in the past day, otherwise you would've had to pay far more. Alright, come and hand over your spirit stones."

When that was said, each of the cultivators immediately took out a storage pouch they had prepared ahead of time and handed them over to the bald old man.

As for Han Li, he took out another two demon beast cores and handed them over, arousing a trace of astonishment from the old man's face.

After examining each of the payments, the bald old man nodded with satisfaction. Seeing this, the scholarly middle-aged man took out a stack of talismans and began to pass them out amongst Han Li and the others.

He pointed to the transportation formation and coldly said, "These are displacement talismans. You can leave after placing them on your body."

The others were hesitant, but Han Li walked into it without a word.

It wasn't that he was displaying courage, but that he had found nothing wrong with the transportation formation after quickly sweeping it with his spiritual sense.

The stone tablet in front of the transportation formation read the words "Wondrous Depths".

Han Li didn't have any particular impression towards this name. From his last experience, it seemed that the islands' names didn't hold much significance.

Chapter 511: Out to Sea Again

After seeing Han Li walk into the teleportation formation without hesitation, the other cultivators paused for a moment before following him.

After seeing that the seven of them had entered the formation spell, the bald old man wore a faint smile and formed an incantation gesture that caused specks of white light to float from his finger.

While staring at the specks of white light, the old man suddenly asked, “Since we’re sending you to the Outer Star Seas in secret, you’re not going to blabber about this, right?”

The embroidered-robed man was quick-witted and immediately replied with a sincere expression, “Of course we won’t. We are truly grateful towards Seniors for being so accommodating. There is no way we would do such a self destructive thing. Moreover, what use would it be for us to say anything?”

Staring at the embroidered-robed man, he coldly said, “If you understand, then good. As there are few people in the Star Palace with our position, we’d receive a stern warning at the worst. But if some rumors do arrive, then Fellow Daoist Gu and I won’t be so forgiving. Additionally, we heard you feared a sudden falling out and all carried response beads. Thorough, but unnecessary. We aren’t about to soil our reputations over a few spirit stones.” He then swept his gaze past the other cultivators before falling onto Han Li.

“Senior truly is a reasonable person. Junior is but a knave that can only think of others in regards to his own desires.” The embroidered-robed man forced a smile but faintly felt a chill run down his back.

“Humph! No need to speak any nonsense! You’re now on your own!” The bald old man didn’t say anything further and flicked his

finger, activating the transportation formation with a faint white magic seal.

Suddenly, the spirit stones around the magic formation flourished with white light, causing the seven to disappear.

When the bald old man saw them successively teleport away, his expression suddenly changed and he bewilderedly asked, “What’s going on? Didn’t you say that you were going to give them false displacement talismans? Why did you give them real ones? This wasn’t what we previously agreed upon.”

The scholarly cultivator coldly snorted and spoke with a grimace, “If I truly took out false displacement talismans, do you really believe we would’ve been let off? The person who gave us the magic treasures was a Nascent Soul eccentric. If we took out false talismans, he would’ve killed us in a fit of anger.” He then took out a white cloth and wiped the cold sweat off of his head.

The bald old man said with a shocked expression, “Nascent Soul cultivator? Brother Qian, are you joking? That person was clearly a late Foundation Establishment cultivator.”

The shriveled man that was left behind was at a loss.

“Brother Gu should know that my spirit beast, a soul hare, has no skills apart from being able to keenly sense another’s spiritual sense.” The scholarly man then flipped his hand to reveal an animal that strongly resembled a kitten.

The spirit beast had ears as slender as a rabbits and sparkling green eyes that continuously darted around. It appeared to be a rather adorable spirit beast.

As he caressed the soul hare, he said, “Although he managed to conceal his aura with some sort of exceptional restraint technique, concealing himself from even the soul hare, he stealthily swept his spiritual sense past the formation spell after we dissolved the restrictions on it. This gave my soul hare the opportunity to detect

something was amiss. My soul here is able to give an appropriate reaction towards mid Core Formation and even late Core formation cultivators. However, it didn't give a reaction, but merely continued to shiver inside my sleeve. It can only mean that his spiritual sense was unfathomably profound, but it has only ever given this response when we visit the elders." A trace of fear was contained in his voice.

"If that's the case, then he must be a Nascent Soul cultivator." Sweat started to line the bald old man's head.

"Even if he wasn't, then he must be a late Core Formation cultivator. Either way it wouldn't take much effort for him to exterminate us." The scholarly man spoke without doubt.

"Luckily, Brother Qian was so quick-witted! If we took out false talismans, we would've brought about our own destruction. I had originally thought he was quite an eccentric individual to give us each a magic treasure without the slightest heartache," But after some further thought, the old man then fearfully asked, "But would there be any problems produced by sending him off to the Outer Star Seas?"

"What problems? He was a vagrant Nascent Soul cultivator. I imagine he headed to the Outer Star Seas because he didn't want to be involved in the war between the Star Palace and the Starfall Coalition. Hence, there will be no problems to be had as long as we don't let our superiors know that we allowed a Nascent Soul cultivator to teleport to the Outer Star Seas. Otherwise, we'll be severely punished." After giving the old man an explanation, his face grew gloomy as he eerily gazed at the dumbstruck shriveled man at their side.

As the scholarly man imposingly gazed at him, the shriveled man suddenly trembled and came to a realization. He hastily took several steps back and said, "I didn't hear anything that you two Seniors just said. I won't speak any drivel... I..." Before the shriveled man could finish, a streak of yellow light silently flew

out and circled around him several times before he fell to pieces.

The bald old man recalled his magic treasure and gloomily said, “With this, no one else will know. Although we had something of a relationship together, unfortunately, I cannot let you leave!”

.....

Han Li and the other six cultivators appeared at the other end of the transportation formation with a flash of white light in a shabby stone room.

Han Li swept his gaze to the corner of the room where a Star Palace cultivator with a frail appearance was speaking with a scar-faced, grey-robed cultivator.

When the Star Palace cultivator saw them appear, he examined them with a frown. However, he soon lost interest and continued to speak with the grey-robed cultivator.

The cultivator in charge of the formation said with a displeased tone, “I’ve already said this. There are currently fixtures in place that render the formation one way only. It can only receive, not send. The sect has already taken all the displacement talismans from me, and even I can no longer return. There is no point in Fellow Daoist trying to force me.”

The grey-robed cultivator shouted out with fury, “Nonsense! There were several people that went back several days ago. How can the transportation formation have changed so quickly?”

“Humph! I’ve already explained it many times, but you just love to ignore me! I no longer have any obligation to speak any further.” The Star Palace cultivator glared at the man before sitting down and closing his eyes.

“You...” When the grey-robed cultivator saw that he was being ignored, his complexion turned bright red, but he didn’t take the slightest action. He didn’t have the courage to act against a Star Palace cultivator. He turned around in place with great agitation,

but when his expression immediately fell upon Han Li and the others that had arrived, his face suddenly grew joyful.

He walked towards them before stopping several steps ahead of them and saluted the embroidered-clothed man, who obviously appeared to be the leader of the group, before politely asking, “Did you Fellow Daoists come from Heavenly Star city?”

After seeing that the scar-faced man was also a late Foundation Establishment cultivator, he didn’t dare to ignore him and replied, “That’s right, we’ve just arrived. What’s wrong, Fellow Daoist?” However, he could already guess what the grey-robed cultivator was about to say.

The grey-robed cultivator asked with a hopeful tone, “I am Xu Yun. I’ve been in the outer seas for several years. Could you tell me whether or not the Starfall Coalition has truly been formed and whether or not the city is on the verge of battle?”

When the embroidered-robed man saw Xu Yun’s expression, he knew what he wanted to hear most, however, the truth would only disappoint him. Hence, he explained with complete openness, “It is true. The Righteous and Devilish Dao have forged the Starfall Coalition and immediately declared war on the Star Palace. As we do not wish to be drawn into the conflict, we teleported here. I fear Fellow Daoist will have no way of returning for the time being.”

Xu Yun stood in place in shock with a dejected expression, “How can that be! I wanted to return and have these painstakingly acquired materials be refined into medicinal pills. What a waste of time!”

After this was said, there was silence in the room.

Despite having racked their brains to arrive at the Outer Star Seas, they were helpless without any way to return.

After a short moment, the embroidered-robed man’s expression changed and he suddenly turned to the grey-robed man. He

cordially said, “My name is Yi Jing, and these are my close friends. Since Fellow Daoist Xu has lived here for several years, could he introduce Wondrous Depths Island to us? Of course, this won’t be for free. We’re willing to give you a few spirit stones as compensation.”

Although Xu Yun didn’t recover from his dejection, he still spiritedly replied, “There is no need for compensation. As you’ve already answered my question, I am merely returning the favor. Please don’t hesitate to ask any questions you may have, and I’ll answer to the best of my knowledge.”

Suddenly, the party of Foundation Establishment cultivators revealed joy at the prospect of being given an introduction to this unfamiliar place. It would prove quite favorable for them in their future endeavors.

When Han Li saw this, he also smiled. With arms crossed, he stood behind them as he waited for the explanation.

Chapter 512: Blackrock City

Yi Jing, the embroidered-robed man, swept his gaze around the room before looking at the Star Palace cultivator sitting in the corner. “It is somewhat inconvenient to speak here. Fellow Daoist Xu, how about we chat outside?”

“Outside? Sure.” Xu Yun indifferently replied.

Yi Jing rejoiced, but he soon thought of something and turned his head around and widely smiled towards Han Li. “Brother Crooked Soul, wouldn’t it be better to come along with us and listen? Better yet, we can work together!”

Han Li blankly stared for a moment before smiling, “Alright, I did want to hear his explanation as well.” Han Li then casually followed after them.

“What? That Fellow Daoist isn’t part of your group?” Xu Yun was quite surprised.

The dark-skinned, middle-aged man suddenly shouted out with a trace of hostility, “He did teleport along with us, but before that, we were strangers!”

Yi Jing frowned in response but didn’t say anything. Xu Yun wordlessly nodded.

After they all walked out of the stone room, the newcomers surveyed their surroundings with amazement. The scene was entirely different from what Han Li had seen on Deep Jade Island.

They emerged within a small market city. Although it appeared crude and only spanned about ten kilometers, the city was created entirely out of black stone. The shabby building that housed the transportation formation lay at the center of the city. It was propped up by a tall altar-like platform with steps descending from every side. Due to the height of the surrounding terrain, they were able to have a clear view of the surrounding city.

The city seemed to be surrounded by twelve meter tall stone walls along with a dense white sparkling barrier. However, there were tall buildings of varying sizes behind the walls. Strangely enough, none of them had pointed roofs; they were all flat.

At first glance, although the city was full of buildings, few of them were independently constructed. It wasn't just a string of stone buildings joined together, but rather, frequent masses of stone buildings were lined up together.

What shocked Han Li the most was that a few mortals were mingling amongst the cultivators on the crude black stone road, occasionally rushing in and out of the stone buildings.

But this wasn't enough to shock Han Li by itself; it was the fact that a majority of the mortals were young, beautiful women. As for the other mortals, they were burly men and delicate youths.

When Yi Jing's party saw this, they were just as shocked as Han Li.

Since they wanted to travel to the Outer Star Seas, it was only natural to do research on the islands in advance. However, this scene was completely contrary to the information they had acquired.

A strange expression momentarily appeared on the Yi Jing's face. He then said with a deep voice, "Fellow Daoist Liu, take another look at the jade slip containing information on Wondrous Depths Island. Could it be that we were mistaken?"

"I... I'll take another look at it!" The woman surnamed Liu hastily looked through her storage pouch.

Xu Yun waved his arm and stopped the woman from finding the jade slip. "There is no need to look for the information on Wondrous Depths Island. Since most of it is false, it is natural to feel surprised."

Yi Jing's expression changed, "False? What is that supposed to

mean?”

“It is quite simple. Wondrous Depths Island is quite different from other demon beast islands. All cultivators are given a gag order prior to their return, allowing them to only leak certain information; else, they would suffer great punishment. It’s hard to say whether or not it will prove fortunate that you’ve arrived at this island.”

“Certain information? Could it be due to the Star Palace?” Lady Liu appeared disturbed.

Xu Yun sighed and said, “It isn’t the Star Palace, but the various united powers that reign over this island. Even the Star Palace is unwilling to lightly offend this faction.”

When those words were said Han Li raised his eyebrows while the others looked at each other in dismay.

Xu Yun chuckled and spoke with a loud, alluring tone, “Hehe! This place isn’t too different from what you’ve imagined. In fact, to some cultivators, it is a place they could only dream of. Blackrock City has the sole market and is the only city on Wondrous Depths Island. So long as you have spirit stones or demon cores, it is a cultivator’s paradise. You can purchase items that cannot be acquired from other demon beast islands. Regardless of whether it’s top grade cultivation vessels, formidable magic treasures, priceless spirit beasts, or exceedingly rare materials, this place has it all.” The nearby cultivators and mortals glanced over due to his loud voice, but they soon averted their eyes and went on their way.

When Yi Jing heard this, he became especially bewildered. As for Han Li, he continued to look around with a calm expression as if he hadn’t heard what Xu Yun had said.

When Xu Yun saw this, he glanced at Han Li with slight surprise.

Yi Jing let out a long sigh and asked with a heavy voice, “Could

Brother Xu give us an introduction of this place?”

Xu Yun seemed to have completely recovered from his low spirits and candidly said, “Of course I can. Since I can’t leave for the time being, how about I give you an explanation of the city while we stroll around? It should prove more useful than giving an empty explanation while standing in place. However, if anyone has any windfalls in the future, please don’t forget about me.”

“Then I must thank you Brother Xu. This city appears quite different from others.” Yi Jing then looked at a male cultivator with a trace of amazement. The cultivator was holding a mortal woman in his embrace in a bold display as they walked down the street, much to the disinterest of the other mortals and cultivators around them.

Xu Yun smiled when he saw this and didn’t say anything further. Instead, he brought them over to a large stone building.

The building had already caught Han Li’s attention as it was one of the largest in the city.

At a distance, he saw that two charming mortal women were standing at its entrance. As the many cultivators entered the building, they gave them a welcoming smile.

Along the way Xu Yun warned them with a solemn expression, “Bear this in mind! Although this isn’t Heavenly Star City, all magic battles are strictly forbidden apart from particular arenas. If this rule is violated, it will be punished by death without question.”

The dark-skinned, middle-aged man spoke with shock, “What? This punishment is even more severe than Heavenly Star City’s!”

Xu Yin slowly explained, “True, it is far more severe. But like this, cultivators who enter the city may truly be at ease without having to worry. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever managed to carry out their revenge and successfully leave the city

alive. After all, there is a Nascent Soul Senior standing guard at all times.”

“A Nascent Soul cultivator!” Yi Jing’s party all wore expressions of shock.

Han Li’s heart trembled violently and he became completely vigilant.

“Alright! Let’s hold off on any more questions until after we go inside.” Underneath the smiles of the two beautiful mortal women, the party apprehensively followed Xu Yun into the building.

As for Han Li, a strange glint flickered from his eyes before he curiously followed them in.

After walking through the large entrance, a huge circular screen blocked their way. The screen was pink and had an image of a palace maid flying through the skies. Although the image of the woman was shown from behind, it appeared to be fluctuating as if she were truly in flight. From the faint pink light that the screen emitted, it couldn’t possibly be a low grade magic tool.

To the sides of the screen, there were two semi-circle doors. And to the front of the screen, there was a female cultivator who wore azure palace robes and appeared to be thirty-years old. She was happily chatting with a smiling male cultivator.

But strangely enough, despite her ordinary looks, each and everyone one of her movements were filled with a mature feminine charm. Additionally, the smile she wore as she spoke displayed a faintly seductive attraction.

Although she was a mid Foundation Establishment cultivator like the man she was speaking to, the man was completely enraptured by her.

However, when the woman caught sight of Xu Yun and the others, her eyes suddenly brightened and she clapped her hands, causing a young mortal girl to come out from behind a door. As the

male cultivator was dragged behind the screen, he gazed at the female cultivator with a reluctant expression.

Chapter 513: Demon Beasts of the Depths

“Well if it isn’t Fellow Daoist Xu? I heard you wanted to return to Heavenly Star City, but I suppose the transportation formation is still unusable?” The woman’s voice was soft and alluring, bringing forth a sense of comfort to those that heard it.

Han Li unconsciously frowned and bitterly laughed in his mind. It seemed a majority of the female cultivators that he met cultivated some sort of secret bewitchment technique. Although this woman’s bewitchment techniques were far inferior to Fairy Violet Spirit’s and Yuan Yao’s, it was more than enough to easily capture the minds of a few low grade male cultivators.

With that thought, Han Li swept his gaze across the party of cultivators. Yi Jing and Xu Yun were able to keep their expressions straight, but the other male cultivators had unnatural expressions. Their gazes unconsciously wandered across the woman’s body.

“These cultivators are new arrivals. I’ve brought them along to take a look,” Xu Yun then said with a resentful tone, “As for returning to Heavenly Star City, I’m afraid that won’t be happening for a while. I didn’t expect the news to be true; a battle is about to occur.”

With luminous eyes, the woman enchantingly covered her smile and said, “It’s still good that you will remain here. If you were to leave, I’d be losing a dear customer.” The woman’s mature charm had fully captured the vulnerable men of the party, leaving the two women among them flushed red with anger.

Annoyed at the woman’s use of her bewitchment technique, Xu Yun called out to her, “Lady Ming, they are my guests. A badge, please.”

“Hehe, alright. But it seems that these Fellow Daoists should have no problem on this island; their cultivation isn’t inferior to yours.” Lady Ming chuckled and then glanced at Han Li and Yi

Jing before erasing her bewitchment technique, returning her appearance to that of an ordinary woman. The change occurred quickly, causing the others to pause for a moment before revealing embarrassment.

The woman then clapped her hands, summoning a young mortal woman from behind the curtain.

Lady Ming coldly spoke to the mortal woman, “Bring Master Xu down to the auction. It should be starting soon!” Then with a wave of her hand, she passed a green jade badge to Xu Yun.

Xu Yun received the badge and followed the mortal woman to the side door without ever looking at her. Of course, Han Li and the others closely followed after them.

In the instant he entered the door, Han Li felt a slight spiritual Qi fluctuation as if he had entered some sort of restriction. His expression momentarily changed before returning to normal.

The party’s gaze brightened as they saw the enchanting scenery that laid behind the screen.

There was a long pathway about six meters wide that led to two expansive halls. The left hall was spacious and bright, and apart from a few tall black stone pillars, there were no other obstructions in sight. In addition, it was currently bustling with activity with about thirty cultivators waiting there, all in a single file line. Regardless of whether these cultivators were male or female, they were each accompanied by a young mortal woman. Although a few of the male cultivators were lecherously sizing up the scantily clad women, there were only a few teasing words spoken at most; they restrained themselves as if they were fearful of the consequences.

At the end of the line, there was a small room that had a door shining with white light. When the cultivators in line pressed their jade badge against the door, it opened and allowed only one person inside.

As for the large hall on the right, it was covered in a barrier of faint blue light, blocking it entirely from sight.

“This place is called the Bright Gem Pavilion. It is specialized in selling off harvests from the outer seas. Particularly valuable items may also be auctioned off here after being appropriately appraised. There are several similar businesses that operate in the city but they are ran by differing powers, each backed by a Nascent Soul cultivator. Of course, at least that much is required to be doing business in a place as untamed as the outer seas.”

When Lady Liu heard this, she took in a cold breath of air and muttered, “So many Nascent Soul cultivators! Could they be from the Four Elements Merchant Union?”

Xu Yun calmly said, “The Four Elements Merchant Union? They have no power here. While they hold dominance over the other demon beast islands, Wondrous Depths Island is the sole island where multiple factions joined hands to control it. While these powers alone cannot compete with the Four Elements Merchant Union in the Inner Star Seas, when joined together here, even the Star Palace dare not treat them lightly. However, this is only limited to Wondrous Depths Island.”

“From Brother Xu’s tone, there seems to be something unique about Wondrous Depths Island? For what reason would so many powers dare to oppose the Four Elements Merchant Union?” As Yi Jing was a shrewd and cunning sort, he heard something amiss from his words.

With an ordinary expression, Xu Yun explained, “Hehe! Brother Yi guessed correctly. The name Wondrous Depths is due to the nearby seas being unfathomably deep and filled with demon beasts. Rare high-grade demon beasts are often seen in those depths. It is said that demon beasts of even grade eight and higher appear there. It is for these high grade demon beasts that these various Nascent Soul experts stand in opposition against the Four Elements Merchant Union, forbidding them from gaining

dominance of the island. It is said that when these depths were discovered, many battles erupted between the Four Elements Merchant Union and the various powers before the Star Palace later intervened to act as a mediator. After some unknown conditions were reached, the island was handed over to the various powers to jointly administer. It was at that time that it became forbidden to spread the truth of Profound Depths Island to the Inner Star Seas; otherwise, one would find themselves wanted dead by the joint powers.”

Han Li was quite amazed at this. As for the others, they felt even more shocked.

“Demon beasts of grade eight or higher are existences equivalent to Nascent Soul cultivators. They truly exist here?” Yi Jing was unable to keep his calm.

“I’m not too sure. I’ve never personally seen them. However, there truly are people that hunt grade seven demon beasts! The Bright Gem Pavilion sells grade seven demon cores where Nascent Soul cultivators compete at extraordinary prices.” Xu Yun then clicked his tongue in admiration.

Han Li, who had kept silent until now, frowned and asked, “Does Fellow Daoist Xu mean that demon beasts are easier to find in the depths?”

Xu Yun glanced at Han Li in surprised. After pausing in thought, he said, “Demon beasts are slightly easier to find in the depths. However, due to the frequent appearances of high grade demon beasts there, there are also countless cultivators that meet their end.”

As Yi Jing’s group had never previously visited another demon beast island, they were somewhat skeptical of these words. But Han Li managed to gain some understanding towards the depths. It seems that this was a place where danger came hand in hand with riches. So that’s why this place was so odd!

The party grew silent before the mortal woman guiding them respectfully asked, “Masters, do you wish to first go to the Treasure Viewing Hall or the Treasure Wrest Hall?”

“There is nothing to see at the Treasure Viewing Hall. It is only some appraisal masters looking at unidentified items before offering to exchange them for spirit stones or put them up for auction. Let’s go to the Treasure Wrest Hall instead. The items there will expand the perspective of all Fellow Daoists.” Xu Yun was clearly familiar with this place. Without waiting for the mortal woman to lead the way, he walked to into the right hall.

When he approached the light barrier, he wordlessly pressed the jade badge against it, causing a circular opening to appear. He then beckoned to the rest of the party before walking in.

When Yi Jing and the others saw this, they simply entered in a line.

When Han Li saw this, he noticed the mortal woman respectfully waiting outside and curiously asked her, “You don’t need to go inside?”

The mortal woman widely smiled at Han Li and explained, “Us mortals aren’t allowed to enter the Treasure Wrest Hall. This servant will be waiting for you outside.”

Han Li nodded and walked through the blue light barrier without another word. The light barrier then closed by itself.

The interior was quite crude and simple. Apart from some wooden chairs, there was just a ten meter wide stage at the end of the hall. There was an old man standing at the back of the stage eloquently speaking into a shining blue stone that he was holding in his hand.

About thirty cultivators of varying grade stood below him, consisting of both Qi Condensation and Foundation Establishment cultivators. There were no Core Formation cultivators among

them.

The old man respectfully said, “This blue light stone is a fire attribute magic tool refined from exceptional materials. Its owner is putting it up for bid starting at five hundred spirit stones. According to long established rules, each increasing bid must be at least thirty spirit stones more. Let us start the bid.”

“Five hundred thirty spirit stones!”

“Five hundred seventy!”

“Six hundred!”

After the old man finished, many cultivators began to shout out bids. Although the bids couldn’t be said to be fiery, the final bid still managed to reach close to seven hundred spirit stones. A young Foundation Establishment cultivator then walked up and bought the magic tool using solely spirit stones before immediately taking it away.

“Next up, we have an earth attribute magic tool...” The old man continued to auction off the next item without any delay.

Han Li naturally had no interests in magic tools, and swept his gaze past the scene instead. He saw Xu Yun whispering to the rest of the party at a corner of the hall. Han Li then walked over with an unchanged expression.

Chapter 514: Female Cultivation Vessels

Lady Liu doubtfully said to Xu Yun, “This seems no different from ordinary auctions. Are we truly going to see any exceptional items here?”

Xu Yun said with a mysterious expression, “Relax! Although auctions frequently take place, occurring anywhere from one every several days to half a month, each auction will always show some exceptional items. Although they aren’t auctioning off the most precious materials, they are still rarely seen in the Inner Star seas.” He then saw Han Li walk over and gave him a smile.

Han Li casually nodded his head and asked a question that left them somewhat surprised, “Fellow Daoist Xu, how many cultivators are there in Blackrock City? There don’t seem to be many to people present.”

Xu Yun calmly admitted, “Brother Crooked Soul is truly discerning! Although there are temporary residences such as inns in Blackstone City, there are no permanent residences for foreign cultivators. High grade cultivators may possess their own cave residence on another island. As for low grade cultivators, they may take shelter in the small villages and towns on other islands with mortals. While all cultivators come to Blackstone City to do business, low grade cultivators are by far the most commonly found.”

Yi Jing paused for a moment before asking a question that puzzled even Han Li, “But mustn’t one be at least Foundation Establishment to survive in the outer seas? Why are there so many mortals and Qi Condensation cultivators here?”

Xu Yun calmly replied, “Brother Yi’s question strikes at the most crucial point, which is the greatest difference between Wondrous Depths Island and the other demon beast islands. For other demon beast islands, a few high grade cultivators go there to hunt demon

beasts before returning after accumulating enough materials. But for Wondrous Depths Island, a few years after the various powers settled here, several spirit stone mines were discovered in some of the nearby islands, and a few production sites for required cultivation materials were established as well, causing the island to become entirely self-sufficient. As such, a few cultivators made a living here and dragged along their families, eventually producing the many mortals and low grade cultivators in this city. I also heard that the powers administering Blackstone City are slowly transporting their main forces over to this city. I reckon in a couple tens of thousands of years, this place will become a second Inner Star Seas. However, apart from Blackstone City, the villages on the other islands can't be considered safe in the least. Those small villages are often exterminated by sudden attacks from high grade demon beasts. This current situation in this place quite resembles how the Inner Star Seas first came to be."

After that was said, the party was left dumbstruck.

Yi Jing let out a deep breath before pensively asking, "Why aren't the Star Palace and the other powers involved with this place?"

Xu Yun coldly snorted and said, "This place is far from being anywhere near as prosperous as the Inner Star Seas. Furthermore, there is still more than enough empty space in the Inner Star Seas for them to vie for. What time do they have to spare over these desolate seas? In fact, the other powers are actually looking forward to having the island's governing factions move their forces over to this island. Then there would be few of the factors at play in the chaotic Inner Star Seas." He was clearly still gloomy about the Star Palace suddenly closing the transportation formation.

After Yi Jing's party heard this, they felt it made sense and didn't speak any further about the subject after glancing at one another. As they were lowly Foundation Establishment cultivators, it would be better for them to refrain from talking about powers far beyond

their control, lest they attract calamity.

After selling off several magic tools and materials, a blue-clothed, middle-aged man appeared behind the old man in charge of the auction. He held a red box containing a fist-sized sphere that was white at its center and purple at its edges.

When Xu Yun saw this, his spirits were roused. “Fellow Daoists, take a look. This is one of the most important goods that are auctioned off at Wondrous Depths Islands, demon beast eggs. There is no lack of such valuable treasures. These items fetch astronomical prices in the Inner Star Seas, but they can be found for much cheaper on Profound Depths Island. This is because apart from a few particular beast eggs, a majority of them are incapable of being transferred over through the teleportation formation. When they are teleported over, most eggs die. That is why whenever a rare demon beast egg appears, the spirit beast is usually hatched and nurtured until it can tolerate the transportation formation before being brought back to the Inner Star Seas. This is, of course, after high grade cultivators bid copious amounts of spirit stones for it.”

“Demon beast egg!” Yi Jing’s eyes brightened. He had always dreamed of raising a high grade demon beast. The others also revealed expressions of pleasant surprise.

With that said, they would later have the opportunity to acquire their own spirit beast. In the Inner Star Seas, finding a good spirit beast was an extremely difficult matter.

“This is the egg of a Violet Cloud Eagle. Upon reaching maturity, it becomes a grade four demon beast. Although it only knows simple defensive magic techniques, it has a body of steel-like feathers and is faster than top grade flying magic tools. With talons that can easily tear through the defenses of a Foundation Establishment cultivator, it can be considered a rare demon beast and undoubtedly an optimal choice for Foundation Establishment Cultivators. The starting price is two thousand spirit stones. Each

bid must increase by at least a hundred. The bid will now start!" The old man seemed quite confident about the popularity of the demon beast egg. After only giving a quick introduction, he started the bid without any delay.

When the cultivators beneath him heard that the bidding had started, they immediately started calling out their prices.

Although grade four demon beasts held little interest to Core Formation cultivators, they're quite suitable for Foundation Establishment cultivators.

This is because not only do higher grade spirit beasts cost far more, but the time it takes for them to mature was also far too long. Even if they used secret techniques to hasten their aging, it would still take far too long for a Foundation Establishment cultivator.

"Two thousand five hundred spirit stones!"

"Two thousand seven hundred!"

"Three thousand!"

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The Violet Cloud Eagle's egg quickly broke three thousand spirit stones before finally topping off at three thousand three hundred spirit stones by an excited female cultivator.

The dark-skinned, middle-aged man gazed at the egg in the woman's hand and muttered, "It truly is far cheaper than the Inner Star Seas. If this were Heavenly Star City, this kind of flying spirit beast would easily fetch over five thousand spirit stones."

Apart from Han Li, all the others watched this scene with bright eyes.

When Xu Yun saw this, he knowingly smiled.

Up next, the old man auctioned off a grade three spirit beast egg followed by a grade four demon beast, both at a considerable price

before concluding the spirit beast egg auction.

Upon seeing what was auctioned next, Lady Liu couldn't help but wear a face of shock, "What's going on?!" The others in her party also looked surprised.

Two beautiful women that appeared to be around twenty years old stood at the old man's side. Although they only had cultivations at the third layer of Qi Condensation, they were both genuine cultivators. From their submissive attitude while being brought on stage, it seemed the two female cultivators were the goods to be auctioned.

Xu Yun didn't reveal the slightest surprise, and gestured for them to listen to what the old man was about to say.

"Up next, we have two low grade Qi Condensation cultivation vessels. They have only cultivated the basic five elements cultivation arts, and both of them are undefiled. According to their requests, only a mid Foundation Establishment cultivator or higher may bid on them. The starting bid on each of them is two thousand spirit stones. Each increase in bid must be..."

Ever since the old man brought the two women on stage, many of the male cultivators beneath him started to leer at the women. However, the old man's words were quite dragged out for a long while and nobody uttered a bid. Two male cultivators that sat in front of the group even began to have a whispered discussion.

"Two thousand spirit stones to buy a third layer female cultivation vessel. If you really wanted a concubine, wouldn't you want to go elsewhere and buy a mortal girl? When they grow old, you could just pass them spirit stones and have them leave. If it were a Foundation Establishment vessel, I'd be more than willing to spend more spirit stones."

"You're dreaming. Do you think you're a Core Formation Cultivator? Don't forget the customs here. Foundation Establishment vessels aren't something that the likes of us could

ever afford. At that amount of spirit stones, it'd be more profitable to buy a spirit beast egg.”

When Han Li heard their chatter, although he felt amazed, any sign of it soon disappeared from his face. He had long ago heard rumors of a few powers secretly nurturing some young female cultivators for the sole purpose of being cultivation vessels. There were even a few high grade cultivators that bestowed female cultivators as gifts. But regardless of how it was said, open auctions of female cultivation vessels never occurred in the Inner Star Seas. It truly shocked him how openly it occurred here.

Yi Jing and company managed to calm their expressions. After all, cultivation vessels were something that everyone knew about in the cultivation world. However, as they had two female cultivators in their party, the current situation was quite uncomfortable.

“There is no need for Fellow Daoists to feel shocked. These women were willing to act as cultivation vessels without coercion. As their aptitudes are terrible as a whole, it would be quite difficult for them to cultivate to high layers of cultivation using ordinary methods. They have no elders to rely on, and no powers are willing to invest the spirit stones required to nurture them. Hence, this is their only method in the Outer Star Seas as they found it disdainful to do mortal's work and suicidal to go out and hunt demon beasts. As they have managed to somewhat cultivate, they will take the initiative to become a cultivation vessel for a higher grade male cultivator. As such, they can give their homes a large amount of spirit stones and manage to acquire a pillar of support for themselves. If they are able to acquire the favor of a male cultivator, they will be able to become a concubine or have an opportunity to become something greater. Naturally, there are even high grade female cultivators that take the initiative to become cultivation vessels for other reasons. But in that case, lower grade male cultivators are forbidden from bidding. That is to

be expected.” Xu Yun slowly explained this as if he were long accustomed to the sight.

Chapter 515: Golden Thumb Pavilion

The others responded to Xu Yun's explanation of the purchasing of cultivation vessels with silence. After all, with two female cultivator companions currently at their side, it was difficult to speak further on the topic.

Han Li stroked his chin without showing the slightest change in expression. He didn't require a vessel to increase his cultivation, nor could he afford to keep something so cumbersome by his side. Although these female cultivator vessels aroused a feeling of discomfort and pity in him, he turned a blind eye as he was disinclined to take action.

At that moment, the two female cultivators on stage wore an expression of disappointment upon not receiving a single bid.

Seeing this, Xu Yun gave an explanation with a faint smile, "Their cultivation is a bit too shallow. Although they were willing to become a cultivation vessel, they can't provide much assistance towards higher grade cultivators. As such, no one was willing to take them. However, it isn't necessarily absolute. If by chance a Foundation Establishment cultivator were to fancy their appearance, it wouldn't be rare for them to later be bought at a high price."

Yi Jing forced a chuckle and didn't say anything further. Xu Yun calmly smiled and didn't seem to mind.

The following items up for auction were more items that were rarely seen in the Inner Star Seas. However, Han Li revealed a lazy expression, unwilling to waste more of his time looking at them.

Just as he was coming up with an excuse to leave, Xu Yun seemed to have noticed Han Li's impatience and took the initiative to say, "While this auction doesn't have any finer goods, the annual combined auction has some truly rare items appear. Fellow Daoists should take a look at it when it comes around. For now, I'll

introduce you to the other areas of Blackrock City.”

Naturally, Yi Jing and the others didn't refuse as they were currently lacking in spirit stones from the cost of the teleportation.

The group nodded their heads and followed Xu Yun out of the Treasure Wreath Hall. The mortal woman waiting outside of the Hall accompanied them until they left the Bright Gem Pavilion.

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“This group of several tens of buildings are temporary residences where foreign mortals are staying for the time being. Mortals that wish to make a living in Blackrock City must first register here, much to the benefit of the city's administrators. If they are unable to find employment after a certain amount of time, they must leave Blackrock City. For example, the mortal women we saw in the Bright Gem Pavilion all live here.”

“That equally large group of building is the city's largest raw material store, the Golden Thumb Pavilion. They specialize in selling all sorts of rare materials. It is said that so long as you know the name of the material, the store will always be able to sell it to you. Although this is somewhat of an exaggeration, its reputation is quite grand!”

“As for those three buildings close to it...”

Xu Yun brought the party down the street and spoke with great familiarity.

When Han Li heard about the Golden Thumb Pavilion, his heart stirred, and he came to a sudden stop.

Xu Yun was baffled and paused for a moment before asking, “Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul, is something wrong?”

Yi Jing's party glanced behind them at Han Li with equivalently puzzled expressions.

Han Li took a quick look at the sky before lowering his head to

calmly say, "I have something that I must attend to alone, and I must part with you here. Perhaps we may see each other again should the future allow it." His voice carried an irrefutable tone.

Xu Yun and Yi Jing were surprised upon hearing this.

They didn't wish for a high grade cultivator such as Han Li to depart their party. But when they attempted to urge him to stay, a cold glint flickered from Han Li's eyes as his gaze swept past them, causing their hearts to tremble. Their words of opposition were involuntarily swallowed, and they could only murmur as they watched Han Li disappear into the Golden Thumb Pavilion.

At that moment, the two bewilderedly glanced at each other with cold sweat dripping down their backs. The others at their side looked at the two with confusion, ignorant of what had happened.

"That person..." Yi Jing forced a laugh and thought to say something.

"Since Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul is unwilling to travel together with us, let's leave him be. It's his decision. Let us continue to take a look at another street!" For some unknown reason, Xu Yun hastily cut off Yi Jing and took the initiative to walk down another street.

Yi Jing then suddenly heard a voice transmission from Xu Yun, "Fellow Daoist Yi, that person's actions are an unfathomable mystery. Let us cut ties with him. Else, we may find ourselves inviting death if we're not careful. It turns out that Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul's cultivation is far beyond ours. Let us not speak of this again."

Yi Jing's expression changed several times upon hearing this. After taking another glance at the Golden Thumb Pavilion, he lightly nodded his head before following after them.

At that moment, Han Li was already being guided by a delicate youth into an elegantly decorated room.

Although the Golden Thumb Pavilion appeared to be one huge stone building from the outside, the interior consisted of many rooms, each specialized in selling all sorts of materials.

Without the slightest of formalities, Han Li had entered the Golden Thumb Pavilion for the purpose of seeing the establishment's steward.

Were it any other cultivator, this wouldn't have been easily accomplished. But after revealing his true Core Formation cultivation, he was immediately brought to the esteemed guest lounge.

Core Formation cultivators couldn't be treated lightly even in Blackstone City.

After waiting for a few moments in the room, an old man with a common appearance walked in with a smile.

"Fellow Daoist's face is quite unfamiliar. It must be your first visit to the Golden Thumb Pavilion! I am the establishment's steward, Li Xun." The old man cupped his fist towards Han Li. He was an early Core Formation cultivator just like Han Li.

With a tone that was neither submissive nor overbearing, Han Li replied, "This is truly my first time here at your esteemed pavilion. Moreover, I have a few things I wish to consult Fellow Daoist Li about. I hope you don't mind!"

"Please, don't hesitate to ask. I will assist you to the best of my ability." Steward Li was quite imposing. Without asking Han Li any questions, he had already slapped his chest in a pledge and agreed.

This forthright and impressive display left a positive impression on Han Li. However, the old man didn't possess the skill to see through Han Li's disguise techniques. He accepted Han Li's sickly appearance as a middle-aged man without the slightest suspicion.

Han Li faintly smiled and directly stated his intentions without

the slightest pretense. “I wish to purchase an ingredient for refining pills. However, I am only aware of its name from antiquity and have been unable to find it. I was hoping to try my luck by coming here and meeting with you, Fellow Daoist Li.”

Li Xun inwardly let out a sigh of relief and replied with a beaming smile, “Hehe! It is but a trivial matter. It is of no problem.” He then changed expressions and coldly spoke in the direction of the door, “Servant, go fetch Gu Yu.”

“Yes!” The young servant swiftly ran off.

Li Xun turned back to Han Li and smiled, “Please wait shortly, Fellow Daoist. Although Gu Yu is only an Qi Condensation cultivator, he has done extensive research on ancient pill formulas and medicines. I’m certain that he won’t leave you disappointed.”

Han Li wore a slight smile on his face and thought to say something else, when a streak of red light flew into the room. The red light circled once around the top of the room, before accurately landing in the old man’s hand. It was a seeking talisman.

A strange expression flickered from Han Li’s eyes as the talisman combusted inside the old man’s hand.

The steward stared at the fire in his hand before he extinguished it. He then raised his head to look at Han Li with a surprised expression.

The old man’s attitude suddenly became far more cordial, “I am truly lacking in manners! I didn’t expect Brother Crooked Soul to have just arrived at Blackrock City today! This store owner should be treating you with the utmost respect!”

In that short moment, he had managed to discover Han Li’s general origins, much to Han Li’s shock. However, his expression maintained a calm smile, revealing none of his inner thoughts.

Han Li played it down, “Fellow Daoist is too polite. I had to use many tricks in order to arrive at Wondrous Depths Island. I didn’t

mean to attract so much attention.”

The old man was able to see that Han Li didn't wish to further speak of the matter and tactfully changed the topic. He then chatted about a few interesting tales about Wondrous Depths Island, much to Han Li's interest.

At that moment, a middle-aged scholarly man entered the room and deeply saluted the two. He respectfully said, “Gu Yu pays his respects to these Seniors. Junior awaits your instructions.”

His appearance was elegant with a somewhat sophisticated aura. He had a long black beard and two shining, black eyes.

Li Xun nodded to him and beckoned him over.

The old man commanded him with an indifferent expression, “This Senior Crooked Soul has a few questions about ancient spiritual medicines. Answer him honestly.”

Gu Yu stood up straight and solemnly said, “As you wish. Junior will answer to the best of his abilities.”

Chapter 516: Demon Echo Grass

Forgoing any needless pretensions, Han Li bluntly asked, “Does Fellow Daoist Gu happen to know about Thousand Leaf Dew?”

“Thousand Leaf Dew?” Gu Yu paused for a moment before quickly replying in a mutter, “This name has a bit of an impression on me. Had you asked me about it a few years ago, I would’ve had no idea. In the past two years, this Junior obtained an ancient record that happened to mention it. This Junior happens to have a duplication of it on a jade slip. Would Senior like to take a look at it?” Having said that, Gu Yu revealed a somewhat cautious expression.

Han Li rejoiced and couldn’t help but reveal excitement in his eyes.

Suppressing the excitement in his heart, Han Li smiled and said, “It is even better that you have the records. If I do find it, then I must truly thank you.”

Gu Yu was also quite pleased. Being able to receive the favor of a Core Formation cultivator was a truly fortunate matter.

He quickly patted down his body before taking out a yellow jade slip and presenting to Han Li with both hands.

Gu Yu respectfully said, “This is the jade slip. Please examine it, Senior!”

Han Li bluntly accepted the jade slip and quickly immersed his spiritual sense into it.

In a mere moment, Han Li’s expression changed from excitement to doubt and then contemplation.

Li Xun carefully watched Han Li’s every movement. Upon seeing Han Li’s expression change several times, an indescribable emotion flickered from his eyes.

Gu Yu was particularly apprehensive, fearing that the Thousand Leaves Dew that was mentioned in the jade slip wasn't the item Han Li was searching for.

Han Li eventually recalled his spiritual sense from the jade slip and slowly said, "Yes, this is the item." However, the excitement in his eyes had greatly faded.

After the old man's gaze flickered he probed, "What is it? Is there something troublesome about the Thousand Leaves Dew?"

Han Li bitterly smiled. "I didn't expect that this item would be so troublesome to acquire. It's closely related to grade eight demon beasts."

Li Xun shockingly glanced at Han Li with an expression of disbelief, "Grade eight demon beasts?"

Han Li sighed and helplessly explained, "That's right. The Thousand Leaves Dew is actually an extract of Demon Echo Grass. To be more exact, from Demon Echo Grass that grows close to grade eight demon beasts."

Li Xun was left speechless by Han Li's words.

He naturally knew what Demon Echo Grass was. It was something that often grew near demon beast nests as it required long years of exposure to demonic Qi to grow and sustain itself. However, Demon Echo Grass found near the den of a grade eight demon beast was an entirely different matter altogether.

Although it was rumored that grade nine and even grade ten demon beasts had been sighted in the Outer Star Seas, at the end of the day, they had only appeared in rumors. As for the old man, the highest grade demon beast he had seen at Blackrock City was a grade seven demon beast, let alone a grade eight demon beast.

Li Xun saw that Han Li's gaze held a trace of astonishment and discouragement. Just what kind of precious medicine pill did he plan on refining, to actually require such an incredulous material?

After toying with the jade slip in his hand, he revealed a trace of hesitation before saying something to Gu Yu that surprised him, “This jade slip has some records that I may need to further examine in the future. Would it be acceptable for Fellow Daoist Gu to give this jade slip to me?”

Gu Yu paused for a moment and then frankly said, “If Senior has a use for it, then please feel free to take it!”

Seeing that Gu Yu was being quite agreeable, Han Li nodded his head and flipped his hand, summoning a small bottle and a talisman with a drawing of a small yellow sword on it.

“As your Senior, I naturally can’t let you come out of this empty handed. The bottle has some medicine pills that can increase your cultivation, and this is a treasure talisman. Go ahead and take them.” Han Li then casually tossed the items over to him.

“Many thanks for Senior’s generosity!” After receiving the items, Gu Yu was unable to contain his joy and repeatedly thanked Han Li. To a Qi Condensation cultivator like himself, these items were truly precious.

“Since Senior Crooked Soul has already bestowed treasures upon you, you may leave for the time being, Gu Yu.” Li Xu was quite shocked at Han Li’s display of generosity, but he still remembered to dismiss Gu Yu with a calm expression.

In the blink of an eye, they were once again the only two people in the room.

“Is there anything else that I may assist you with apart from that matter? Please don’t hesitate to ask.” Li Xun spoke in an exceptionally forthright manner.

“Since that’s the case, there is one other thing that I wish to trouble you with. Might you be selling the horn of an Agate Beast?”

“Hehe, Fellow Daoist came to the right place! Although Agate Beast Horn is an exceptionally rare material, I managed to

purchase two such horns last month. If Fellow Daoist desires it, I can sell one to you right away.” The old man clapped his hands with a smile and immediately gave the order for it to be delivered without a moment of pause.

Pleasant surprise appeared on Han Li’s face as he repeatedly expressed his thanks.

Not long after, a young servant entered the room while carrying an exquisite wooden box on a silver plate.

“Fellow Daoist, take a look. Does this Agate Horn fulfill your expectations?”

Han Li solemnly nodded his head and reached out to the wooden box. As soon as he opened the box, blue light was released, revealing a half-foot-long spiral horn. The sharp horn shined with a strikingly brilliant blue light.

Han Li then closed the wooden box with a satisfied expression, “Not bad! This will be quite suitable. Could Fellow Daoist tell me how many spirit stones this will cost?”

Li Xun pleasantly smiled and said, “This store acquired the horn for five thousand spirit stones. Since Fellow Daoist requires it, you only need to return the cost.”

Naturally, Han Li wasn’t going to haggle over the price. He immediately expressed his thanks and took out the equivalent in mid grade spirit stones before handing it over to the old man.

The old man received the spirit stones with a wave of his sleeve and then asked with a wide smile, “Does Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul have any plans in mind following his arrival on the island? Although Fellow Daoist’s magic power is profound, the demon beasts here are truly hard to handle. No small number of Core Formation cultivators have been seriously injured by tackling the seas alone. How about I introduce you to a few similar grade cultivators? It would be considerably safer if you were to set out to

sea together.”

Han Li smiled upon hearing this. The purpose of the old man’s courteous and friendly behavior from the beginning was for drawing him in.

“Many thanks for Fellow Daoist Li’s kindness. However, I must soon prepare to refine a few medicine pills. And after I consume the pills, I will have to enter seclusion for some time. I won’t be heading out to hunt demon beasts in the near future.” Han Li gave a smooth refusal with an embarrassed expression, but in truth, he was absolutely unwilling to travel out to sea with unfamiliar cultivators.

Although a trace of disappointment flickered across his face, he immediately continued without a care, “That is fine too. It is considerably safer to first increase one’s cultivation and one’s familiarity with the region. However, if Fellow Daoist Crooked Soul does later wish to find companions, please don’t forget about me!”

Han Li naturally agreed and further chatted with the old man for a moment before taking his leave.

The old man saw Han Li off at the building’s exit before returning inside.

Just as the old man sat down, he suddenly heard a voice calmly say, “How about it? Will this person be useful to us?” A vague silhouette soon emerged from the landscape painting on the wall, bringing forth another person into the room.

The white-clothed man remained in the air while covered in azure light, making for a rather mysterious display.

The old man confidently said, “There is no need to worry. Although we only chatted for a short moment, from his strange appearance, that cultivator Crooked Soul should be a vagrant cultivator that travels alone. So long as he witnesses the dangers of

travelling the depths alone, he will come to know the advantages of my offer. He will come back sooner or later.”

The white-clothed man coldly refuted, “Humph! That isn’t guaranteed.”

Li Xun shook his head, “What? An early Core Formation cultivator can roam the depths and hunt demon beasts alone?”

The white-clothed cultivator grew silent before solemnly saying, “He isn’t an ordinary Core Formation cultivator. When you were chatting in the room, I was able to feel someone watching me for some unknown reason. Although he didn’t glance in the direction I was hidden, I suspect that he was aware of my existence and only chose not to disclose it.”

The old man was stunned. He then bewilderedly said, “Are you not mistaken? Your concealment technique is something that even higher grade cultivators are incapable of uncovering. Don’t tell me that this Crooked Soul fellow is actually a late Core Formation cultivator.”

The white-clothed man doubtfully said, “That’s hard to say! It is quite possible that he cultivates an unusual cultivation art or possesses some peculiar treasure.”

After circling the room several times, the old man eventually frowned and said, “Leave it be. Regardless of whether this cultivator is exceptional or ordinary, we’ve already tried our hardest to befriend him. It was the correct decision either way!”

The white-clothed cultivator nodded in approval and spoke no further.

Chapter 517: Island in the Mist

By the time the white robed cultivator and the old man finished their discussion, Han Li had already entered a nearby miscellaneous goods store near the Golden Thumb Pavilion. He purchased a map of the local seas and information on the demon beasts that roamed around there before leaving. After finding a secluded area, Han Li started to look through the information.

After only a cursory glance, Han Li unconsciously frown.

There were truly far too many dangerous areas in the vicinity of Profound Depths Island. Could it be that high grade demon beasts often roamed through these areas?”

As for the location of the famed depths, it wasn't too far away from the island. Han Li would be able to reach it after only flying half a month south at full speed. However, the depths were truly vast, spanning over five million kilometers of jagged, uneven territory. This was without even mentioning the territory's unfathomable depths, as no one had yet to truly explore its farthest reaches.

After Han Li skimmed once through the jade slip, he quickly put it away. Standing in place with a solemn expression, he lowered his head as began to think deeply.

After an unknown amount of time had past, Han Li raised his head, wearing an indifferent expression. He then directly flew out of Blackrock City without any further deliberation. Upon leaving the city, Han Li immediately turned into a streak of azure light and soared through the skies.

Profound Depths Island was a medium-sized island, but apart from Blackrock City, the island was completely barren. Not a single village or town could be seen.

For some unknown reason, it seemed that both cultivators and

mortals weren't setting up residence on the other parts of the island.

Han Li quickly flew away from Wondrous Depths Island. After raising his head to the skies and determining his direction, he headed north.

Currently, he wanted to find an island where cultivators scarcely appeared. He didn't want to be in a crowded area and attract attention. As a result, he deliberately chose to fly far away from the Wondrous Depths.

There weren't many cultivators in the seas around Wondrous Depths Island. In addition, all those islands had cultivators and mortals residing on them. Han Li didn't bother to stop at any of them and shot past them without regard.

It was clear that the northern seas had far fewer cultivators as he had expected.

After flying for about twelve days, he sparsely saw any other cultivators. And when he did encounter them, the low grade cultivators would immediately veer out of his way, and high grade cultivators would watch him with vigilance. Like other demon beast islands, killing others for their treasures was a common occurrence.

Han Li was particularly vigilant as well.

After flying for another two days and finally seeing no trace of other cultivators, Han Li changed direction and started flying west.

According to the map, there would be a few islands with small spirit veins in that direction. As the spirit veins on these islands were low grade, and the distance from the Wondrous Depths was far, along with a complete lack of safety and other various reasons, very few cultivators resided there.

In the case of mortals, they all took residence on the islands

nearby Wondrous Depths Island, ensuring some degree of safety.

Of course, Han Li didn't care about these conditions. He merely wanted to take a look and see if any of the islands were to his liking.

...

About thirty kilometers ahead of him, Han Li spotted a small island. This would be the fourth uninhabited island with a spirit vein he had encountered so far.

The island wasn't large, but its terrain was both uncommon and varied. There were barren landscapes, dense forests full of unknown trees, grasslands with beautiful flowers and even a small mountain range.

Han Li swept his spiritual sense over the island and found no traces of any other cultivators staying there.

The spirit vein on this island wasn't low-grade. Despite its small size, it was actually a peak mid-grade spirit vein. While it couldn't be considered a top-grade spirit vein, it still released an abundance of spiritual Qi.

It seemed the reason why other cultivators had left this island alone wasn't due to the spirit vein, but rather the small island's exceptionally strange environment.

However, there was something about the island that Han Li fancied in particular: the vast white mist that surrounded it. The mist wasn't natural; it was produced by a few nearby whirlpools. While the mist did cover the island's sides, it didn't surround it from above.

Han Li was quite amazed by the sight, but when he dived into the nearby waters and saw the island from underwater, the source of the mist was made clear.

At the bottom of the island, there were countless finger-sized holes along with thousands upon thousands of slender silver fish

darting through them. While the fish appeared no different from common small fish, after catching one with his hands covered in spiritual power, Han Li discovered that it had no scales. Instead, it was covered in sharp spikes of silver bone. Had an ordinary person attempted to hold it, they would've been left with shredded hands.

As Han Li looked at it, a thought suddenly came to mind, "Sea Shredder Fish!"

This small fish is a low grade one demon beast that lives in large schools and spouts water out from the surface of the sea as a source of enjoyment. The source of its ridiculous name is likely due to the iron-like spikes protruding from its body.

With so many Sea Shredder Fish in the island's vicinity, they were able to spout out enough sea water to completely cover the entire island in mist. It made for a rare sight indeed.

If Han Li hadn't encountered a Silverwing Bird on his way and chased after it through the fog, he never would've found the island. He undoubtedly would've just brushed past the fog. Seeing a bit of sea mist in the distance was extremely common.

After circling around the island several times, he quickly came to the decision to establish his cave residence on this island.

What other island could possibly be more secretive and to his liking than this one?

The small spirit vein was located on the island's five-kilometer-long mountain range with a few sparse peaks, the tallest peak reaching a hundred twenty meters high. Being so small, Han Li didn't have the option for an expansive cave residence. Hence, he merely looked for a small valley at the bottom of the mountain range and started to tunnel through the stone.

With Han Li's current cultivation, it was practically effortless for him to carve out a cave residence similar to his previous one. After a few short days, he managed to finish carving out the general

outline of his new residence.

Han Li was disinterested in carving out the finer details of his cave residence. Instead, he first set down a few formation tools that he had personally refined, covering both his cave residence and the mountain range in a spell restriction.

At a distance, the mountain range could no longer be seen, and was instead replaced by a verdant forest. The illusory forest seamlessly bordered a nearby forest without the slightest flaw.

From above, Han Li carefully examined the mountain range with chin in hand and was left feeling somewhat uneasy. If a high grade cultivator happened to pass through the mist like he had, this restriction wouldn't be enough to fool them.

After muttering to himself, an idea suddenly came to mind.

Han Li directly flew back to his new cave residence and quickly inspected the materials he had on hand before starting to refine some items in a secret room.

Seven days later, Han Li emerged once more from his cave residence with a dozen sets of similar formation tools.

These sets of formation flags and formation plates were extremely crude, and by no means impressive. But after Han Li placed them at various areas throughout the small island, streams of mist began to wildly emerge from each of the formations. Soon, the new expanse of mist merged together with the existing mist of sea water to completely envelop the island, hiding it entirely from view. In this manner, any cultivators passing by would find it difficult to spot the island unless they were flying at a low altitude.

After examining it from every angle, Han Li finally felt at ease. Although he had spent no small number of spirit stones to activate so many formations, he didn't care in the least. He was more than willing to bankrupt himself to avoid any potential disasters.

Han Li then returned to his cave residence with the utmost speed

before hammering out some of the finer details of his cave residence such as his insect room, herb garden, and so on.

Two days later, Han Li was sitting inside a stone room with a solemn expression. He was immersing his spiritual sense into the yellow jade slip that Gu Yu had given to him, carefully sifting through its content.

With a twitch of his face, he extracted his spiritual sense from the jade slip and entered a state of deep contemplation.

A moment later, he stood up and strolled around the stone room several times before wearing a heavier expression.

He then clutched his storage pouch and took out a white jade box. Han Li gazed at it for a moment before slowly opening the box to reveal a few small, rainbow-colored beads.

Chapter 518: Flame Mirage Moth

Han Li nimbly grabbed one of the beads within the box and held it between his fingers close to his eye. After staring at it for a moment, Han Li slowly closed his eyes and reviewed the image of what he had seen in the jade slip.

The image was of a fist-sized pearl that emitted rainbow light and had over ten smaller beads floating around it. Those smaller pearls appeared exactly the same as the one currently in his hand. As for the large rainbow pearl, it was the Heavenmend Pill that he had seen shooting out of the Heavenvoid Cauldron. This strange image had appeared in the jade slip without the slightest description, provoking an air of mystery.

When Han Li had swept his mind past the image in the jade slip he had acquired from Gu Yu, he had been astonished. It was for that reason he had decided to add on a treasure talisman as payment for the jade slip. Were it not for this, he would've only given Gu Yu the medicine pills at most.

The jade slip possessed many bizarre images, but each of them lacked any kind of description. There were pictures of magic tools and treasures, as well as many demon beasts and ghostly monstrosities that Han Li had never seen before. After seeing the picture of the Heavenmend Pill among them, he felt that these images must be extremely significant.

Han Li carefully committed these pictures to memory and would treat them with great importance should he see them in the future.

However, Han Li glanced at the beads in the case with a trace of awkwardness.

There was no doubt that these rainbow beads had a strong relationship with the Heavenmend Pill. Why else would they appear together in the image? After considering that the beads had been refined from Zenith Brilliance's skeleton, he suddenly

recalled Zenith Brilliance's Bloodjade Spiders. Could it be that the Bone Sage's traitorous disciple had entered Heavenvoid Hall with the spiders and acquired a Heavenmend Pill?

This was one possible explanation as to why Zenith Brilliance's bones had turned rainbow colored and why they had formed into beads after being exposed to flames.

From Han Li's experience with taking many medicine pills, the Heavenmend Pill must've either not yet been fully refined, or its medicinal nature was so fierce that it required one to continue strenuously refining it after consumption.

From these conjectures and its prominent appearance in the jade slip, it appeared like these rainbow beads held a significant relation towards the Heavenmend Pearl.

Although using a cultivator's body as a pill furnace to produce medicine pills was rarely seen in the cultivation world, Han Li had personally witnessed this once before. The Black Fiend School's Blood Congealed Five Element Cores was one particularly bloody and tyrannical example.

But with all this being said, it was only Han Li's wishful thinking in the end. He wasn't about to rashly swallow them without further deliberation.

With some further thought, he decided to leave this hidden room and head towards the insect rooms.

His current insect rooms weren't as simple as they had been in Heavenly Star City. They were split into five stone rooms of differing sizes. Among two of these rooms were Han Li's two separate groups of Gold Devouring Beetles.

One of the swarms had followed Han Li through Heavenvoid Hall in a display of amazing strength, with the tens of thousands Gold Devouring Beetles having consumed no small number of Ironfire Ants. The other swarm was made up of the thousand elites he had

left in his cave residence at Heavenly Star City.

Perhaps due to eating a great number of Ironfire Ants, the tens of thousands of Gold Devouring Beetles appeared to be on the verge of reproducing. They'd already started to devour one another, much to Han Li's pleasant surprise.

As for the other stone rooms, one housed Han Li's sole remaining Bloodjade Spider while another room housed his perpetually sleeping Weeping Soul Beast. The final room contained the Gold Threaded Silkworms he had acquired from Heavenvoid Hall.

Although Han Li had the Weeping Soul Beast's control pearl in hand, he had always felt hesitant about refining it, and decided to put it away for the time being. Rather, his delay in refining it didn't seem to affect the spirit beast all that much.

When Han Li's acquisition of the Gold Threaded Silkworms hadn't occurred on a whim. They had a position on the list of exotic insects despite being ranked quite low. Although they weren't a match for the Bloodjade Spider, they had a seldomly known second evolution. Given enough time, they could possibly evolve into a Flame Mirage Moth. While they would still be somewhat weaker than the Gold Devouring Beetles, ranking seventeen on the list of exotic insects, they had an innate ability of transformation.

While its power was formidable, its description was quite vague. It seems this insect had seldomly been seen even in ancient times. Even if the Mirage Flame Moth's high ranking was somewhat inaccurate, it was by no means insignificant.

As such, in spite of the old eccentrics flabbergasted gaze, he had chosen to gather up the Gold Threaded Silkworms that were on the verge of death. They had been discarded by Wan Tianming without the slightest hesitation as the Gold Threaded Silkworms had nearly exhausted the entirety of their Origin Qi at the time.

After acquiring them, Han Li continuously fed them Soul

Nurturing Pills and other rare spiritual medicines. However, all this had seemingly accomplished at this point was prolonging the inevitable. With each passing day, they grew increasingly haggard and Han Li could only helplessly watch as they continued to decline.

At that moment, an idea suddenly came to him. He directly arrived at the Gold Threaded Silkworm's room and frowned at what he saw through the spell restriction barrier.

At that moment, the huge dark-green silkworms were motionlessly lying on the ground as if they had already died. Were it not for the faint spiritual Qi emitted from their bodies, he would've believed them to be dead.

Han Li entered the room without hesitation and circled around the exotic insects for a moment before picking out the male and female silkworms with the strongest spirit amongst them. Afterwards, he took out two rainbow beads from the jade box and fed one to each silkworm before leaving the room.

Han Li's thoughts were quite simple.

Since these insects couldn't be saved, he may as well test test the medicinal effects of the rainbow beads. With the grand reputation of the Heavenmend Pill, their medicinal powers should be beyond miraculous.

If these beads were as he had imagined and were truly Heavenmend Pills, then he would stand to benefit even if the Gold Threaded Silkworms couldn't be saved.

Naturally, if the Gold Threaded Silkworms responded negatively to the beads, he would no longer pay any heed to the beads.

The following days were spent looking after the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng with the utmost care. This unique root was of great importance to his later formation of a Nascent Soul.

At the center of his medicinal garden, Han Li sectioned off a

small piece of earth. After placing down formation flags that he had specifically refined for the task, the surrounding soil became an impenetrable layer of golden stone.

With this, he could finally place the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng inside with confidence.

As for the ginseng's white rabbit spirit incarnation, it was still trapped inside a jade box. Han Li had no intention of keeping it there for long. After all, it could have a negative effect on the spirit ginseng if they were separated for too long.

Han Li then brought the talisman clad jade box into the medicinal garden and placed it at the spirit ginseng's side.

After tearing off the talismans and opening the box, a streak of white light shot out of the box and circled around the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng before disappearing inside it.

When Han Li saw this, he wore a knowing smile.

It seemed the white rabbit incarnation was filled with trepidation since it had already been captured once before. It was quite timid.

But when Han Li glanced at the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng's body, he began to ponder whether or not the green liquid would have any miraculous effects on it.

He then put the thought aside for the time being. The spirit ginseng wasn't going anywhere, and the green liquid was required elsewhere. These tests would have to be saved for later.

Furthermore, the green liquid might greatly increase the abilities of the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng, allowing it to possibly escape from the formation spell and leave him overcome with grief.

This wasn't an ordinary plant, but a legendary divine medicinal plant. It was best to be careful.

With that thought, Han Li no longer paid any attention to the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng after successfully containing it.

As for the green liquid, Han Li was currently using all of it to mature the Soul Nurturing Tree, one of the renowned three divine woods. Although it was only a small root, Han Li was confident that within several years, it would regrow back into a ten thousand year tree.

Originally, Han Li intended to study the Heavenvoid Cauldron, and see if he could find a way to open it.

But in the process, he accidentally stumbled across the Bone Sage's small rib bone, diverting his interest for the time being. Since it was able to withstand the fearsome Sacred Asura Flames, it should prove to be quite unordinary.

Laying down on his bed, he toyed with the sparkling white item in his hand as he curiously glanced at it.

Chapter 519: Profound Yin Arts

The first thing Han Li realized about the rib bone was that it was obviously not the Sage Bone's true rib bone. Its current form was merely a trick that the old devil had used to deceive the eyes of others. Without even mentioning the odd material that it had been created from, one could already tell it wasn't any sort of magic treasure from the faint spiritual Qi that it released. However, there was no doubt that it was a man made item. But regardless of whether Han Li immersed it with spiritual sense or spiritual power, the rib didn't respond in the slightest.

Han Li furrowed his brow and immediately recalled that the old devil had tread the path of a demon ghost. Perhaps this item required Yin Soul Qi in order to control it.

Although Han Li didn't possess any Yin Soul Qi himself, he did have the Soul Congregation Bowl that he had acquired long ago. He had already consumed all of the Yin souls in order to refine his puppets, but the bowl itself still possessed a great amount of Yin Qi.

He took out the Soul Congregation Bowl from his spirit pouch, and casually stared at the pitch-black bowl in his hand before emitting a flash of blue light from his palm. A trace of Yin Qi then flowed into his body through his hand. After slowly circulating the Yin Qi throughout his body, he grasped the rib bone with his other hand.

Han Li rigidly started at the rib bone as it quickly became enveloped in a ball of icy, black Yin Qi.

The rib bone finally responded. The originally flawless white exterior of the rib bone started to turn black, absorbing the Yin Qi surrounding it, turning half white and half black.

Han Li wasn't particularly surprised by this transformation; he merely raised his eyebrow at the sight. After closing his eyes in

thought, Han Li sat up in his bed, suddenly emitting a blinding azure light from the hand holding the Soul Congregation Bowl. At the same time, ghostly wails could be faintly heard from his other hand, gathering an even darker cloud of Yin Qi around the rib bone.

The rib bone wildly devoured the Yin Qi without the slightest restraint. After the time it took to finish a cup of tea, the rib bone eventually turned completely black.

The bone suddenly began to release a low-pitched hum and emitted rays of pitch-black light, filling the room with a freakish, eerie aura.

Han Li hesitantly put away the Soul Congregation Bowl and relaxed his grip on the bone, allowing it to float from his hand. The Yin Qi that had surrounded the bone was then dispersed by the shock of the black radiance that it suddenly emitted.

Han Li's gaze continuously flickered as he watched the bizarre scene.

Apart from the continuous low-pitched hums and flickers of radiance, the black bone no longer showed another other changes.

After a moment, Han Li's expression stirred, and he suddenly beckoned towards it.

Woosh. The bone flew into his grasp. After taking another look at it, he immersed his spiritual sense into it. This time, his spiritual sense was no longer obstructed, allowing him to easily enter the rib bone.

As a result, black light flashed before his eyes, revealing a stream of huge ancient characters and pictures into his mind.

“Jade slip!” Han Li muttered with an expression of shock.

The bone was some sort of unique jade slip, something that he had previously guessed. After restraining the excitement in his heart, he started to earnestly analyze the words within.

“Profound Yin Arts!”

Han Li read through the first half of the words and found them extremely familiar. He was certain that he had read them before. Although he hadn't personally cultivated this renowned Devilish Dao cultivation art, his avatar Crooked Soul had refined a derivative of it, the Divine Bloodlight. After reading through it, Han Li came to the conclusion that while the cultivation arts had many minor differences, as a whole they were largely the same. The rib bone jade slip actually contained the so-called Profound Yin Scriptures.

To tell the truth, Han Li was somewhat disappointed. Since he already cultivated the Azure Essence Sword Arts, he wasn't about to foolishly abandon them to recultivate with this technique even if it did possess an overbearing power.

However, he didn't immediately withdraw his spiritual sense from the Profound Yin Scriptures. The Devil Dao secret techniques that were contained in the second half were something that he could possibly cultivate.

Soon after Han Li read through each of the unbelievable secret techniques, his original disappointment turned into surprise, then slight solemnness, and finally, excitement.

The secret techniques were powerful and truly inconceivable. He was confident that once he cultivated the ninth layer of the Azure Essence Sword Arts and the suitable secret techniques of the Profound Yin Scriptures, he would be able to escape from any Nascent Soul cultivator that crossed his path. No longer would he be doomed to helplessly accept death if he encountered any of those Nascent Soul Eccentrics!

Among these secret techniques were Zenith Yin's Heavenwide Corpsefire. As for the Heavenwide Demon Corpse, they were merely refined corpses that happened to be produced in the process of refining the Corpsefire.

Unfortunately, these secret techniques required the Profound Yin Arts as a cultivation base and required a cultivation at the Nascent Soul stage or higher. Otherwise, he would've definitely attempted to refine it for himself. After all, he had personally witness the ferocious power of the Heavenwide Corpsefire.

But even as powerful as it was, the weaknesses of the Heavenwide Corpsefire were made clear from its cultivation chant.

When Han Li saw this, he coldly chuckled. If Zenith Yin tried to use Heavenwide Corpsefire to deal with him in the future, Han Li would surely give him a nice surprise!

After looking through it for a moment more, Han Li was able to find three secret techniques that he fancied that a Core Formation cultivator could refine. He then committed them to memory until he could find the time to cultivate them.

Han Li carefully put away the small rib bone. Along with feelings of great satisfaction from what he had gained, he could feel his heart brimming with excitement.

It was then that Han Li recalled what he had originally planned. Han Li's hand grasped onto the storage pouch containing the Heavenvoid Cauldron with his curiosity once again set aflame.

He instantly stood up from his bed and directly headed towards the hidden room in his cave residence.

If he could somehow manage to open the Heavenvoid Cauldron, he could acquire many ancient treasures, not to mention Heavenmend Pills. He would be able to substantially increase his strength.

With those thoughts in mind, Han Li began a routine where he would observe the Gold Threaded Silkworms every day before spending the rest of the day studying the Heavenvoid Cauldron. In addition, he would occasionally browse through all sorts of ancient jade slips in an attempt to find any hints regarding a way to open

the cauldron.

Unfortunately, after half a month passed, Han Li had exhausted all the methods he could think of. He had no choice but to concede that the Heavenvoid Cauldron, the ranked one secret treasure in the Scattered Star Seas, wasn't capable of being opened by a mere Core Formation cultivator such as himself.

The cauldron was truly impressive. Be it heat, water or any of the many treasures that Han Li had used, none of them were able to leave so much as a trace on the cauldron. Even a strike from his recently restored Divine Devilbane Lightning wasn't able to scratch the Heavenvoid Cauldron.

As for other unconventional methods of opening the Heavenvoid Cauldron, Han Li had tried each and every one of them to only be met with failure.

In the end, Han Li could only place the Heavenvoid Cauldron back into his storage pouch and leave the matter be.

As for Han Li's suspicion that the Heavenvoid Cauldron could be opened with the Celestial Ice Pearl, he didn't dare to test it. The Celestial Ice Flames were an existence that inspired fear even in Nascent Soul cultivators. He fundamentally had no thoughts of attempting to refine and control the pearl until he reached either the Nascent Soul stage or perhaps late Core Formation. Han Li was still able to recognize his own limits.

During that half month, the two Gold Threaded Silkworms that consumed the rainbow beads showed no reaction in the slightest. They remained entirely the same as if the beads possessed no medicinal qualities at all. As for the tens of thousands of Gold Devouring Beetles Han Li had brought back with him from Heavenvoid Hall, they had already started cannibalizing each other en masse and were on the verge of laying new eggs, much to Han Li's delight.

As of current, Han Li's next matter at hand would be tempering

his seventy-two Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

He didn't plan on allowing the refined crystal that he had acquired on the Path of Molten Rock to go to waste either. He wanted to temper traces of the crystal into each of his flying swords. While he wouldn't dare to proclaim his Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords as indestructible after the inclusion of the refined crystal, the number of items that could damage them in this world would be very few. It would prove to be quite advantageous in his future battles against high grade cultivators.

However, processing the crystal was an extremely grueling process.

As the item itself was an extraordinary material, Han Li reckoned that the crystal would require at least half a year to refine with the aid of formation spells. But if he were to run out of magic power halfway and interrupt the procedure, the crystal would be completely destroyed.

This was no joking matter!

Originally, he wouldn't have dared to make an attempt with his measly early Core Formation cultivation, even with the aid of spiritual medicines. However, he now had the Myriad Year Spirit Milk. Although he had used a portion of it in his rush to Heavenly Star City, he still had more than enough to process the crystal.

Since he would encounter no small amount of danger in the nearby seas, it was imperative that Han Li tempered his flying swords so that he may withstand any dangers that he encountered.

Chapter 520: Metamorphosis Tribulation

Naturally, Han Li had already constructed a tool refining room in his new cave residence. After placing down another concealment restriction, he brought the refined crystal and Myriad Year Spirit Milk into the formation before tightly shutting the door to the room.

The other operations in the cave residence were smoothly taken care of by the huge ape puppets he had left outside while he remained in seclusion.

A year silently passed in this manner before one day, something unexpected occurred.

Without the slightest warning, a huge rumble suddenly reverberated throughout the cave residence, accompanied by a continuous earthquake. In addition, faint rolls of violent thunder could be heard from the outside. The rolls of thunder grew increasingly louder as if the entire island was being covered in a violent storm.

With a muffled thump, the door of the tool refining room opened.

Han Li leapt out of the room with a cold expression, bewilderment clear in his eyes. Upon hearing the huge rumbling outside of his cave residence, he suddenly slapped his hand against a spirit pouch at his waist, causing a yellow streak of light to emerge. It circled around in the air before landing in his palm.

It was a faint-yellow, meter-long formation flag with a few talisman characters embroidered onto it.

Without much thought, Han Li spat out a cloud of azure Qi onto the flag, causing it to shine with yellow light. As a cold glint flickered from Han Li's eyes, the flag shot into the earth with a flick of his wrist. The formation flag dug into the earth in the blink

of an eye and disappeared from sight.

With a muffled incantation of varying tones leaving Han Li's mouth, yet another astonishing scene occurred.

As Han Li continued his incantation, the ground and walls began to shine with golden light as if they consisted of raw gold. At the same time, the trembling and frightening rolls of thunder suddenly came to a halt, restoring everything back to normal.

When Han Li saw this, his expression relaxed. However, the confusion in his eyes had yet to disappear. He then flew out of his cave residence in a streak of azure light towards the sky.

A moment later, Han Li was floating above the small island. Although it was enveloped in a barrier of mist, his sight wasn't obstructed at all as the mist was the result of his own formation spells.

The scene before him caused his expression to change several times. Thanks to the formation spells that he had placed on the mountain range and his cave residence, they were left mostly unharmed. However, the areas outside the formation spell were still groaning from ongoing tremors.

Not only were the hills and other tall masses of earth breaking into dust with huge cracks starting to appear throughout the island, but the vegetation had folded into the earth from the violent quaking as well.

But that alone wasn't enough to cause Han Li to be at a loss! There were also stormy waves that suddenly surged around the island.

Four-hundred-meter tall waves continuously thrashed against the island and washed away the earth, turning nearly half the island into lakes and marshes.

Out past the vast ocean mists in the direction of the huge waves, there were monstrous snarls that were inserted among the rolls of

thunder as if a mad beast was furiously thrashing about. Each of its roars was soon followed by thunder and a huge wave.

Looking in the direction of the huge waves, Han Li thought, 'Could it be that a high grade demon beast is stirring up havoc nearby?'

From the earth shattering scene, it was certain to be a demon beast that possessed a huge body.

With that thought, Han Li's curiosity was on the rise.

After muttering to himself for a short moment, he enveloped himself in azure radiance and flew straight into the fog towards the directions of the roars.

For fear of being seen, Han Li restrained his Qi and dimmed the radiance of his aura until it was no longer visible. In an instant, there was no longer any trace of him.

After flying into the sea mist, Han Li managed to find his goal with a single glance.

Nearby, there was an enormous demon beast wildly thrashing about! Although he had already anticipated this, Han Li took in a cold breath of fright at its size.

This giant was the first tortoise type demon beast he had ever seen. Its body spanned about three kilometers in area and it seemed as if there was a huge mountain floating in the ocean. Its shell was pitch-black and it had huge pillar-like legs. It also had a three-hundred-meter long silver tail that continuously swept at the nearby sea.

With the head of an azure flood dragon, the tortoise roared towards the sky. With each of its roars, huge waves and demonic white winds spread outward from its body, thoroughly enveloping the sea in its ongoing outbursts.

But what shocked Han Li the most wasn't this but the dense black clouds that the tortoise was roaring at tens of thousands of

miles in the sky. Dense overlapping bolts of lightning struck down from the black skies to form fearsome webs of lightning around the demon tortoise, continuously striking at it.

The tortoise relied on the huge waves and demonic winds to forcibly block the strikes of the heavenly lightning. Although it managed to remain unharmed, it became increasingly violent as the barrage continued, gradually turning its originally emerald green eyes to red.

“Metamorphosis Tribulation!” Han Li muttered to himself with a bewildered expression. He blinked in shock.

The ‘Metamorphosis Tribulation’ is a tribulation of heavenly lightning that all demon beasts experience when they ascend from grade seven to grade eight. After experiencing this tribulation, the demon beast will be able to shed off its bestial form and change into a more human-like form. And as their cultivation grows deeper, so will the intensity of their transformation as well.

It was said that when a demon beast reached grade ten, they were completely indistinguishable from a human.

Although Han Li had encountered this information many times in jade slips, he was now witnessing the scene with his own eyes. He didn’t know whether he should consider himself fortunate or unlucky.

Its appearance could be considered fortunate as it answered Han Li’s doubts about whether or not grade eight demon beasts resided near Wondrous Depths Island. This gave him hope of finding Thousand Leaves Dew later on.

Unfortunately, after its tribulation, the demon beast would likely set up its nest in the nearby water. Han Li had no interest in becoming neighbors with a grade eight demon beast! It may be a grade eight demon beast that had just ascended, but it would still be quite difficult for Han Li to evade its notice.

It was still unable to find his cave residence while it was a grade seven demon beast. But after it reached grade eight, its strengthened spiritual sense would pose a problem.

Perhaps one day, the demon tortoise would arrive at his cave residence. When it came to enforcing their own territory, high grade demon beasts weren't exactly known to be lenient.

'Could it be that I will have to discard my cave residence after having only just established it?' Han Li flusteredly thought. The flying swords contained in his body began to shake with excitement.

By the time he was forced out of seclusion, he had already finished tempering his seventy-two Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords with the refined crystal.

It had been significantly more difficult to process the refined crystal than he had anticipated. His original estimate of half a year had actually stretched into nearly an entire year.

With that done, Han Li decided to take advantage of the continued seclusion to specially temper his flying swords.

Were it not for the disturbance of the demon beast, he would've likely spent several more months in seclusion.

'I should take this opportunity to launch a surprise attack while its Origin Qi is still greatly damaged after it finishes its tribulation. If I am able to kill it, it would be a cause for joy, but if I fail, I will have to leave the island.' With that thought, Han Li's heart grew tense. But a moment later, he shook his head in rejection of the idea.

Even when greatly weakened, he still wouldn't prove to be an opponent of a grade eight demon beast.

Han Li didn't know precisely how powerful grade eight demon beasts were, but he had personally witnessed the earth-shattering strength of the divine abilities of Nascent Soul cultivators.

With such great danger, it would be better to just pack up and leave.

Unfortunately, his Gold Devouring Beetles were laying eggs. He wasn't sure what would happen if he were to bring them along in his storage pouch, but he didn't have much choice.

Han Li watched the lightning flicker against the body of the huge tortoise and sighed before returning to his cave residence.

Han Li didn't want to wait for the demon beast to finish its tribulation and discover him hiding away. That would be utterly disastrous!

But just as Han Li turned around, a series of sharp whistles came from across the horizon, accompanied by flickers of golden light.

Then from the opposite horizon, a melodious sigh of wind spread throughout the sky, making way for a red streak of radiance that flew over.

When Han Li saw this, he unconsciously frowned. But before he could respond, a huge disturbance in the sea rose from near the huge turtle. Several tens of thick pillars of fire shot out of the sea, and the sea water began to quickly rise as if something gigantic was emerging from the sea.

Han Li was greatly shocked by this and hastily shot away to conceal himself before watching the scene with amazement.

With a flash of blue light, a huge red beast emerged from the parted waves. Upon revealing itself, it released a horse-like neigh at a monstrous volume, leaving Ha Li's ears buzzing.

Stunned, Han Li nearly fell from the sky. He hastily released magic power to steady himself.

As he quickly circulated his Great Development Arts throughout his body, Han Li stared at the strange demon beast with a pale face full of awe.

Chapter 521: Savage Flood Dragon

‘Savage Flood Dragon!’ Han Li inwardly shouted with an expression of rarely-seen fear.

This scarlet demon beast had a body that stretched out to four hundred meters and appeared similar to the the inky flood dragon that he had seen before. Furthermore, it was one of the more fearsome types of flood dragons amongst its kind. Judging by the congealed essence that was displayed by the light wandering across its scarlet scales, it appeared to be a genuine grade eight demon beast. The demon beast emitted a pressure that Han Li had only experienced from Nascent Soul cultivators.

Flood dragons were one of the few primordial demon beasts that remained in this world since the ages of antiquity. Not only did these demon beasts cultivate far faster than others, but their magic power would also greatly exceed that of other demon beasts of similar ranking. It wasn’t impossible for a flood dragon to even defeat an opponent that was of a superior grade.

If what the ancient records said was true, then the grade eight Savage Flood Dragon should be an equal match for average grade nine demon beasts.

This knowledge caused Han Li to turn pale from shock. He immediately wanted to run, but he still managed to retain enough reason to not make any rash movements. There were still two more streaks of light flying across the sky towards them. It seemed they came with hostile intentions since they were flying over without the slightest attempt at concealment.

As these developments occurred, Han Li placed the blood red cloak on his body as stealthily as possible. At the same time, he also summoned the Five Element Bands and the flower basket into his hands. With these at the ready, Han Li felt far more at ease.

By this point, the Savage Flood Dragon had already let out a long

hiss. It turned its long head towards the huge turtle resisting the lightning with all its strength, watching it with a strange expression.

Soon, the flood dragon's body emitted a frightening blue light, causing his body to suddenly shrink.

After only a short moment, the flood dragon's body had assumed a form that was close in size and shape to a human.

Its head was still that of a fierce flood dragon, but its limbs appeared to be that of a human, apart from the scarlet scales that covered its body. It also had a thick scaly tail that continuously whipped around.

The flood dragon's transformation left Han Li dumbstruck.

The flood dragon stood idly on top of the raging seas as if he were standing on land, not swaying in the slightest.

However, after he transformed, his eyes unconsciously swept towards Han Li's direction, and its gaze became icy. Han Li suddenly felt his body break out into a chill as he tightly grabbed onto his ancient treasures with sweaty palms.

Fortunately, the golden light and red brilliance had just arrived during that time.

The Savage Flood Dragon immediately lost interest in Han Li as its cold gaze swept past the three people that had appeared before it.

The golden light was revealed to be an old Daoist with the appearance of a sage. He carried a saber on his back and a horsetail whisk in his hand and wore a brilliant gold Daoist's robe containing the eight trigrams. He twirled his beard as he examined the human form of the flood dragon. While his face showed shock, his eyes surprisingly contained a trace of greed.

Not far away from the old Daoist stood two middle-aged men with identical appearances. Their skin appeared as ashen as

corpse's and they wore brilliant fire-red robes. The only difference between them that Han Li could distinguish was that one of them held a three-meter-long ghost head staff, while the other wore a massive red gourd on their back.

They first glanced at the huge turtle beneath them before turning their eyes to the Savage Flood Dragon and the old Daoist. They were both silent and expressionless.

The old man appeared to only possess an early Nascent Soul cultivation, and the two middle-aged men appeared to only be late Core Formation cultivators. But Han Li was baffled to see that the two red-robed middle-aged man were able to face the immense pressure from both the flood dragon and the old Nascent Soul Daoist without showing the slightest fear.

After the old man's eyes wandered several times around the two, he suddenly smiled at them and said, "Hehe! I didn't think that I'd encounter the Huo Brothers. This humble Daoist apologizes for not recognizing you sooner!"

The face of the red-robed man with the gourd on his back twitched. He then expressionlessly said, "We also didn't expect to find Senior Jin Xia here. If Senior wishes to exterminate the two demon beasts beneath us, we would be glad to work together."

When the old Daoist heard this, he felt gloomy.

The flood dragon was an existence that was equivalent to a grade nine demon beast. He wasn't so arrogant to believe that he could handle it alone. Were it not for the confidence he held in his incisive magic treasures, he wouldn't even consider fighting it.

After the old Daoist frowned, he dryly coughed several times before bluntly saying, "You Fellow Daoists must be joking. This humble Daoist wouldn't be able to deal with the Savage Flood Dragon by himself. Likewise, neither could the two of you restrain it. But together, we might have a chance at success. Perhaps you Fellow Daoists would be interested in giving it a try? It's been quite

a while since a grade eight demon beast has been seen. If we were to join hands, we might be able to luckily succeed. In that case, I will only require the flood dragon's soul. I have no need of its demon core." Daoist Jin Xia stared at the two red-robed men as he spoke.

The old Daoist's words seemed to run contrary to the two red-robed men's expectations. But after they glanced at each other, clearly communicating through some unknown method, the middle-aged man holding the ghost head staff briefly nodded and replied, "Fine! We'll agree to Senior's conditions. Us Juniors don't wish to relinquish this opportunity and will strive our hardest!"

When that was said, his companion had already taken the fire-red gourd into his hand.

When the old Daoist heard this, he rejoiced. He raised his arm and flung out an azure jade ring from his sleeve. It flew downwards, leaving a strange cry in its wake.

The Savage Flood Dragon stared coldly at the three as if it understood their words. A fierce expression flickered from his face as he opened his mouth, shooting a beam of scarlet light towards the old Daoist. Its silhouette then flickered and disappeared from sight.

In the following moment, the Savage Flood Dragon re-appeared behind the two red-robed men in a flash. With fingers wrapped in blue light, it fiercely swiped its claws down to be met with a clang.

The ghost head staff in one of their hands had automatically taken the shape of a three-meter-tall malevolent spirit, and blocked the strike, saving their lives.

When this occurred, the brothers surnamed Huo were greatly frightened. Their stiff, corpse-like faces were now overwhelmed with shock.

At that same moment, the large red gourd lightly shook. With a

howl of wind, countless grains of red crystal rushed out of the gourd, enveloping an area of over three hundred meters turning it into a realm of blazing fire and trapping the Savage Flood Dragon within it.

As for the scarlet ray of light that the flood dragon had released, it was currently tangling with the old Daoist's jade ring as if it were alive.

The old Daoist's expression was quite solemn and he did his utmost to prevent the scarlet light from nearing his body. He knew that the scarlet light was not to be underestimated.

The Savage Flood Dragon was suppressing the two late Core Formation cultivators in a clear attempt to allow the demon tortoise to finish its tribulation.

Conversely, the old Daoist and the red-robed man feared the escape of the Savage Flood Dragon and rejoiced at every bit of magic power that the demon beast wasted. It would save them quite a bit of trouble later on. As for the huge tortoise, even if its tribulation was completed, its Origin Qi would be greatly damaged, and it wouldn't pose much of a threat.

As such, the three cultivators continued their fight with the demon beast in the sky as the huge tortoise beneath them reached the key moment of its tribulation. The bolts of lightning falling from the sky began to form silver spheres of lightning. Each strike caused the huge tortoise to tremble and was met with wild roars.

Han Li rejoiced at the sight.

Naturally, he had no thoughts to take advantage of the situation. A battle at this level was beyond what he could handle. But either way, regardless of which side won, it would be more than enough to solve Han Li's cave residence predicament.

As of now, an elusive opportunity for escape had finally showed itself. Han Li immediately made use of it, immersing the blood-red

cape with his magic power and tearing through the sky as a streak of blood-red light.

Han Li's sudden appearance and show of speed had caused both the cultivators and the flood dragon to become alarmed, but they soon ignored him.

This was because they were able to perceive that Han Li's cultivation was quite shallow despite traveling at such a fast speed. An early Core Formation cultivator would prove insignificant to all of them.

As Han Li was fearful of the demon beasts and cultivators discovering his cave residence, he decided to fly in a direction away from the sea mist.

With the blood-red cloak's astonishing speed, Han Li was able to travel several thousands of kilometers in moments. After seeing that there were no pursuers, he finally relaxed and flew without his cloak as he went on ahead.

After flying for the greater part of a day, Han Li casually sought an island to stay on for the time being.

Several days later, Han Li reckoned that the battle should've reached a conclusion, and he carefully flew back.

As expected, the sea nearby the mist was completely tranquil with no demon beasts, cultivators, or heavenly lightning in sight as if nothing had occurred.

Han Li floated above the nearby seas and muttered to himself for a moment before slowly releasing his spiritual sense into the nearby seas. His body then suddenly blurred with a flash of azure light as he dived into the sea. In the time it took to finish a meal, Han Li emerged, holding something in each of his hands.

Chapter 522: Rainbow Beads and New Gold Devouring Beetles

One of the items Han Li found in the sea below where the previous battle occurred was about ten meters long and sparkled with silver light. It appeared to be a portion of the huge tortoise's tail. The other item was half of the ghost head staff. It still contained a significant amount of spiritual Qi.

It was quite difficult to make out who had won the battle based on these two items.

After the tribulation had concluded, it was even possible that the battle had moved to a different section of the sea.

After all, battles at the Nascent Soul and grade eight demon beast stage weren't matters that could be easily concluded, regardless of whether it were a cultivator wanting to slay a demon beast for their core, or a demon beast wishing to devour a cultivator's Nascent Soul. Either way, it would prove quite easy for the weaker party to escape.

Han Li looked at the two items in his hands with narrowed eyes. After some further thought, he tossed the two items back into the sea.

Although it wasn't likely that someone would pursue these two items, Han Li was unwilling to invite any disaster to his doorstep.

After carefully examining his surroundings for a moment and making certain that there were no concealed cultivators or demon beasts in the vicinity, he flew into the sea mist without any further hesitation.

When Han Li saw that the restrictions outside his cave residence were untouched, he finally felt his worries dissipate as he hurriedly entered.

Before the battle had erupted, Han Li had originally planned

to abandon the island. But afterwards, he changed his mind.

Even if the demon tortoise survived the battle and its nest was in the nearby seas, it definitely would've received heavy wounds. On the other hand, after going through such a grave experience, it most likely would've left. Moreover, finding another hidden island wasn't going to be an easy matter. And even if he did find another, who knew if there would be yet another high grade demon beast lurking nearby.

Hence, it was much safer to stay.

However, Han Li didn't dare to let down his guard, and immediately prioritized putting down many more illusion formations on the small island. He also carved out two false cave residences on other parts of the island, and placed separate concealment restrictions on them. With this, if any powerful enemies were to attack, he would be given an opportunity to escape.

With all of that done, Han Li finally felt at ease.

However, Han Li was unaware that the battle that had occurred that day was actually the spark that would lead to a huge battle between cultivators and demon beasts a few days later. The enraged flood dragons of the Outer Star Seas had all joined together to form a man hunting party, sowing calamity amongst human cultivators.

Han Li, who had spent several days in peace in his cave residence, had already thrown the recent battle to the back of his head.

He was currently refining a few sets of enemy entrapment formation tools for his future demon beast hunts. As he was planning to hunt down grade six and seven demon beasts, he couldn't afford to be careless.

During this time, the Gold Devouring Beetles finally finished laying their eggs.

As Han Li was joyously observing the beetle eggs, his face suddenly revealed amazement.

Although the eggs were shiny silver as expected, the eggs also had rather eye-catching specks of black on them as well.

“This is...” After looking at this, Han Li’s first thought was that the Gold Devouring Beetles had somehow ascended in grade. But Han Li soon rejected this idea.

Although the Gold Devouring Beetles were quite powerful, they were nowhere near as indestructible as the legends had described their matured form to be. There was no way they could have matured so quickly.

Hence, after some further thought, Han Li recalled the countless Ironfire Ants that they had devoured. Could it be that the Gold Devouring Beetles had consumed so many Ironfire Ants that they underwent an unexpected mutation?

Han Li’s curiosity was piqued.

However, from his previous experiences, it would take about a year for the eggs to hatch. As such, he forcefully suppressed his anticipation as he placed down a soul control formation around the eggs, placing a drop of blood into it so that they would recognize him as their master. Afterwards, Han Li took a look at the Gold Threaded Silkworms while he was at the insect rooms.

As of current, apart from the two Gold Threaded Silkworms that had taken the rainbow beads, the rest of Gold Threaded Silkworms had slowly deteriorated before inevitably perishing, even with the support of spirit medicines. Likewise, the two survivors showed no signs of improving despite having already survived for so long and being given so much medicine.

At that moment, Han Li had entirely given up on preserving them and had specially prepared some Rainbow Skirt Grass for the two Gold Threaded Silkworms. He wanted to see whether or not it

had a similar effect like on his beetles and would cause them to lay eggs.

With these results, Han Li was certain that while the rainbow beads weren't on par with the Heavenmend Pills, they only possessed positive effects and weren't harmful to the user.

After half a month, Han Li had finished constructing his sets of formation spell setup tools and had fed the the Rainbow Skirt Grass to the Gold Threaded Silkworms. He was now planning to head into seclusion and consume the rainbow beads. Minusing the two beads he had given to the silkworms, Han Li still had six on hand.

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Han Li sat cross-legged at the center of the room and stared at the box containing the beads with an appearance of great tranquility. Since he already came to a decision, he wasn't going to cowardly back down now. He swiftly picked up a bead and placed it in his mouth. Soon, Han Li wore an expression of astonishment.

The originally solid bead turned incredibly soft upon entering his mouth. It was somewhat bitter but it was easily swallowed. After entering his stomach, he began to feel a strange warmth from his Dantian.

Han Li frowned and immersed his spiritual sense within himself. The rainbow bead was completely intact within his stomach and emitted a faint glow.

He muttered to himself for a moment after seeing this and soon clutched his hands in an incantation gesture. A thin thread of azure flame spouted out from his golden core and enveloped the bead before slowly refining it. In an instant, the warmth became scorching hot!

Han Li then closed his eyes and began to meditate.

Two months later, Han Li had completely refined the bead with

his core fire, but he didn't feel any immediate changes. After some hesitation, he began to refine the second one.

Nearly a year passed by in the blink of an eye. Han Li emerged from seclusion with all six rainbow beads having been cleanly consumed. He could now feel a slight change and was now absorbing spiritual Qi and producing spiritual power at a slightly faster rate. Although the effects weren't very obvious, Han Li was wild with joy.

After all, the effects of the rainbow beads had yet to be fully displayed.

However, Han Li's cheerful mood was soon dampened by a cold reality.

After the Gold Threaded Silkworms ate the Rainbow Skirt Grass, they had laid eggs as expected, over a hundred even. However, all of the eggs were dead. The Gold Threaded Silkworms had both died after laying the eggs as well.

Han Li stood outside the insect room, staring at the dead eggs in silence.

Although he had suffered quite a loss, he did manage to verify the medicinal effects of the Rainbow Skirt Grass at the very least.

Although he suspected that the mature Rainbow Skirt Grass would have a similar effect to induce reproduction in higher grade demon beasts, he hadn't had the chance to test it until now. From the Gold Threaded Silkworm's actions, it was proven almost certainly true.

The rarer and higher grade the demon beast, the more difficult it would be to reproduce! It was no wonder that high grade demon beasts so rapidly flocked to the Rainbow Skirt Grass when it was in bloom.

As the saying goes, disaster and fortune often came hand in hand. While Han Li was brooding over the Gold Threaded Silkworms,

the Gold Devouring Beetle eggs hatched several days later.

The newly-hatched Gold Devouring Beetles gave Han Li a rather pleasant surprise.

They appeared no different than before, apart from the color of their shells. In addition to the golden spots on their silver shells, there were also traces of black. But more importantly, the spiritual Qi they emitted gave Han Li a rather distinct impression.

Han Li was now completely certain that the Gold Devouring Beetles had changed because the previous generation of Gold Devouring Beetles had consumed countless Ironfire Ants.

Of course, Han Li would have to do some testing to find out what differences they had developed.

As a result, Han Li placed all the beetles into a storage pouch and reentered his hidden room. About half a day later, he left the room with unconcealed excitement.

These new Gold Devouring Beetles were far more powerful than he had anticipated. He now felt even more assured in his future hunts for spirit beasts.

Although Han Li still wished to research the puppet fragments from the Heavenvoid Hall, he reckoned it wasn't going to be a matter that only took a few years. As such, he could only put it off for later.

Han Li had already finished his preparations for his sea expedition for high grade demon beast cores. He already had his Rainbow Skirt Grass and sets of formation setup tools. As there could come a chance that they may prove to be useful, Han Li took along the Bloodjade Spider and the Weeping Soul Beast. While Han Li felt quite uneasy towards leaving behind the spiritual medicines, the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng in particular, they weren't something that he could bring along.

After all, he didn't know precisely how long he would be out to

sea. The Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng was still a plant and couldn't be separated too long from the ground.

With that in mind, Han Li bluntly left behind a portion of the newly-hatched Gold Devouring Beetles at the cave residence.

He gave them the order to kill any cultivators or demon beasts that trespassed.

This way, any trespassers would be killed, so long as they weren't Nascent Soul cultivators or grade eight demon beasts.

Chapter 523: Extracting Souls and Seizing Cores

With the formations at the entrance of his cave residence completed, Han Li had completed his preparations for an extended absence. As for the Soul Nurturing Tree, it had been continuously fed the green liquid over the span of two years and was now fully grown. The tree was just like the Gold Lightning Bamboo had been; it ceased growing after it reached the age of ten thousand years. It was completely unaffected by the green liquid after reaching that point of maturation.

Naturally, Han Li wasn't going to just leave the tree behind and let it gather dust. He carved the foot-long trunk into a dozen thumb-sized beads and strung them together on a golden thread before wearing them around his neck. This type of divine wood didn't need to be meticulously refined; one simply needed to wear it close to their body to receive its wondrous soul nurturing and recovery effects.

After dealing with everything in his cave residence, Han Li left his cave residence and quietly flew out from the mist surrounding the small island.

With the Rainbow Skirt Grass in hand, Han Li had no plans of heading into the depths. Not only did demon beasts of grade eight and higher wander there, but cultivators gathered too. Such a place would be completely unsuitable for him to place down a spell formation and lure demon beasts into. So long as he had the Rainbow Skirt Grass, any part of the nearby seas were all the same to him. As such, it would be better for him to find a secluded coral island instead.

With that thought in mind, Han Li got his bearings before shooting off into the west, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

A month later, Han Li stopped above a fire-red coral reef.

On his way here, he had already spotted many coral islands, but for fear of being too close to his cave residence and attracting trouble, he ignored them and continued flying. Although this reef was so small that it couldn't be called an island, it was more than enough for the purposes of planting Rainbow Skirt Grass.

Han Li decided that this would be the location of his first hunting grounds.

Currently, he had already placed down four spell formations near the coral reef, tightly encasing the nearby surroundings. All that was left was to carefully place the Rainbow Skirt Grass at the center of the magic formations. Since he wanted to attract grade six demon beasts, he needed to mature the Rainbow Skirt Grass to four hundred years old.

It would require a month's worth of time to acquire enough green liquid to mature the Rainbow Skirt Grass to that age. However, he wasn't going to be able to spend that time idly.

The first three blooms of the Rainbow Skirt Grass attracted a few low grade demon beasts from him to practice on. Although pills made from the cores of grade five demon beasts would have little effect on Han Li's cultivation, he could exchange them for quite a few spirit stones. He wasn't about to just let them go.

As expected, after the fourth time the Rainbow Skirt Grass bloomed, four grade five demon beasts were pulled in. They were quickly and easily executed with a few of the Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

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Gazing at the Rainbow Skirt Grass with three uncurled leaves, Han Li let a long breath before carefully poured the green liquid on top of the plant. He then put the bottle away and sat down at its side before meditating.

When the third day had passed, the Rainbow Skirt Grass

uncurled its fourth leaf, releasing its demon-luring scent. Han Li had spent the past two days honing his strength in silent meditation.

Although killing grade five and six demon beasts should pose no problem to him, at the end of the day he was still a lone person deep at sea. It was better to be safe than sorry.

The effects of the Rainbow Skirt Grass wasn't always consistent. In the past, he had attracted a grade seven black dragon, nearly bringing about his death. He was forced to sacrifice a rather valuable spell formation in order to make his escape.

Han Li truly didn't wish to lose his life over a brief moment of carelessness.

After most of the day had passed, Han Li's expression suddenly twitched. He opened his eyes and coldly stared into the distance.

A short moment later, a storm of dense black clouds had in the horizon, accompanied by a thirty-meter-wide whirlpool that suddenly appeared beneath it. A faint rumbling could be heard coming from within it.

With a calm expression, Han Li shot into the air as a streak of azure light and gazed at the scene before him.

With the muffled rumblings coming from the whirlpool, a demon beast clad in black Qi leapt out from within. The demon beast wasn't large, and was only about ten meters long. As it gazed towards the Rainbow Skirt Grass, it released a violent screech.

Han Li let out a sigh of relief at the sight.

He was unable to see the true form of the demon beast due to the black Qi blocking it from his sight. But from intensity of black Qi, it appeared to be a grade six demon beast.

This was the most optimal result as it shouldn't prove to be dangerous in even the slightest.

As a result, Han Li remained motionless in the air as he stared down at the demon beast.

After only a short moment, the demon beast had been driven into a frenzy by the scent of the Rainbow Skirt Grass. With a loud snarl, it fiercely pounced towards the coral reef, stirring up a thirty-meter-tall wave following in its wake.

After having experienced the huge tortoise's waves as it underwent tribulation, this mere level of display wasn't enough to impress Han Li.

After seeing the demon beast draw close to the coral reef, a sneer appeared on Han Li's face. With a wave of his arm, a dark-green formation plate appeared in his palm. After emitting a flash of azure light from his hand, Han Li struck the formation plate without hesitation, causing it to suddenly glow with a blinding yellow light.

In the next moment, over ten beams of yellow light shot out from the sea, forming a barrier of yellow fire that surrounded the demon beast.

The demon beast was clearly startled. It immediately brandished two claws from within the black cloud of qi and fiercely struck against the yellow light barrier.

With a huge bang, the yellow light barrier wavered on the verge of collapse. It appeared as if it wouldn't be able to withstand much more.

However, it had already bought Han Li more than enough time. The Five Element Bands he had prepared in his hand released a clear ring before disappearing in a blur.

As a series of cries came from within the black cloud, rainbow light suddenly appeared and then disappeared into the black Qi. A second later, a frightened roar was heard as the black Qi scattered, revealing the demon beast within.

The demon beast turned out to be a twelve-meter-long grey prawn with three green eyes on each side of its head. It appeared panic-stricken.

It was currently restricted by the five copper bands and was rendered completely incapable of escaping.

At that moment, two streaks of bright azure light flew down and revolved around the huge prawn in coordination, chopping it into pieces. Green blood splattered onto the seas below.

The Five Element Bands trembled several times before disappearing in a glow of light and reappearing in Han Li's grasp a moment later.

Han Li wore a slight smile on his face and shook the formation plate in his hand. The yellow radiance immediately faded away as the yellow barrier beneath him followed suit.

Then with a wave of his hand, the Five Element Bands had been replaced with a pitch-black alms bowl in a flicker of light.

With both hands clasped on the bowl, Han Li floated down next to the prawn's corpse.

A cold glint flickered from Han Li's eyes as he stared at the huge prawn's head. Without further deliberation, Han Li extended his finger and started to mutter an incantation. The tip of his finger began to shine and gradually grew brighter.

Han Li coldly snorted. Several thin white strings shot out from Han Li's finger before piercing into the huge prawn's skull. Then with a shake of his finger, the white strings pulled out a fist-sized orb of green light from within the prawn's head and brought it towards the Soul Congregation Bowl.

The green light knew that this wouldn't end well, and began to struggle with all its might against the white threads. However, it was unable to break free as it slowly drew closer to the bowl.

When it was about a foot away from the Soul Congregation Bowl,

the green orb of light was wrapped in black light and drawn into the bowl.

Han Li smiled at the scene. He then approached the prawn's corpse and rummaged through the scattered remains before he found a light blue sphere.

Not only were grade six demon beast cores larger than those from grade five, but they were also more translucent and shined with a faint glow. It made for a beautiful sight.

After looking at it for a moment more, Han Li placed the core into his storage pouch and took another look at the huge prawn's corpse as if something had just come to mind. He suddenly raised his hand and cut it with two more streaks of light.

He sliced off its claws and placed them into his storage pouch without any further thought. Afterwards, he shot a small fireball at the corpse, turning all of the remaining pieces into ashes.

Han Li calmly flew back to the Rainbow Skirt Grass and went back to sitting down cross-legged.

He was confident that the nearby seas didn't only have one grade six demon beast. Now, he just had to calmly wait until the next one arrived.

Chapter 524: Spying

Seven years after Han Li began harvesting demon beasts, a group of cultivators with varying cultivations were slowly flying at a low altitude in a region of the Outer Star Seas. They would occasionally glance around as if they were searching for something. The group of cultivators were all were at Foundation Establishment, apart from their three leaders. One of their leaders was a mid Core Formation while the other two were at early Core Formation.

A middle-aged cultivator with a yellowish complexion impatiently asked, “Brother Qiu, is that grade six demon beast truly nearby? We’ve already searched for several days and we even expanded our search perimeter. Isn’t it likely that the information is wrong?” It appeared he was talking to the gaunt old man that wore a solemn expression at his side. The old man was the highest ranked cultivator in their party, the sole mid Core Formation cultivator.

The old man indifferently replied, “Don’t be impatient, Fellow Daoist Min. The information we received was but an approximate location. It is also quite common for the location to change after several days. And even then, following this information is better than just randomly roaming the seas. I am confident that the intelligence vendor wouldn’t have dared to swindle me.”

The third Core Formation cultivator, a large man with a fiendish face, suddenly said, “The demon beast might’ve already left the area, or perhaps its nest doesn’t lie in this area.”

“Impossible. This is a rare Vivid Glass Beast. We’ve swept our spiritual sense in the nearby seas and spotted the beast’s most beloved food, the Tri-colored Seaweed. Its nest must be nearby.” The gaunt old man spoke with a tone of certainty.

Because the two Core Formation cultivators seemed to hold the old man in high regard, they said no more. Instead, they continued

to sweep their spiritual sense in every direction.

As for the Foundation Establishment cultivators behind them, most were either their disciples or younger relatives. As such, none of them dared to intrude in their conversation.

Under the lead of the three Core Formation cultivators, the group continued to search for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, they found absolutely nothing. By this time, the old man begun to frown.

“Sigh! Originally, when one stayed near the depths, even if their gains were infrequent, one could still acquire four high grade demon cores a year. But now, ever since we left the depths, we’ve only encountered two high grade demon beasts, and even worse, we failed to acquire their cores.” The cultivator surnamed Min grumbled as if he had a bellyful of grievances.

“Enough. Brother Min, you should be aware of the circumstances in the depths. If we were to go to there now, we would only be going to our deaths, rather than hunting demon beasts.”

With a face pale from trepidation, the man with a fierce appearance said, “It is still truly abnormal! The depths were a place where you could make a living if you were clever and avoided the center region. But two years ago ever since the Demon Beast Insurrection started, the entire depths became a restricted area. High grade cultivators that commonly roamed the depths never returned. And in the past year, several Nascent Soul eccentrics joined hands and explored the center region of the depths. But as a result, they turned tail and fled, perhaps due to having encountered unbeatable odds. Even then, Master Four Paths was the only Nascent Soul cultivator able to return alive. It seems Wondrous Depths Island won’t be able to last much longer.”

The bony old man was silent for a moment before his face twitched, saying, “Fellow Daoist Xuan’s words do hold reason. Although the demon beasts of the depths can still be considered

docile as they have yet to head out of the depths, who knows when they will attack in an overwhelming force. This isn't something that is impossible. We have no choice but to come up with a response!"

It seems the old man was extremely concerned about the situation in the depths.

The cultivator surnamed Min bitterly smiled with a face of helplessness, "But as of current, the Star Palace is busy fighting with the Starfall Coalition on the other side. The transportation formation will only accept arrivals, not departures. Even if we want to leave, we can't."

"Humph! That isn't certain." The fierce-looking man wore an expression of disagreement.

"Oh? Could it be that Brother Xuan has another way?" The cultivator surnamed Min appeared astonished, but soon, his interest was roused.

The man lowered his voice and spoke with a mysterious tone, "Hehe! There is no other way. I merely heard that there were people at Wondrous Depth Island selling displacement talismans at high prices. Although there aren't many, there are people that have already returned to the Inner Star Seas!"

"There is such a thing? Then how about we..." The cultivator surnamed Min rejoiced. He thought to further pursue the matter but the bony old man interrupted him with a snort.

"Stop dreaming! Even if you manage to acquire the displacement talismans, do you truly dare to return to Heavenly Star City? It is even more dangerous over there! You will certainly be dragged into the conflict if you are to return. Although the demon beasts of the depths are behaving abnormally, it is still completely normal outside the depths. If something does truly happen, we only need to find a desolate island and conceal ourselves there. That would be far better than returning and being dragged into a war." A

strange light appeared in the old man's eyes as if he had spent a long time thinking on the matter.

When the two heard this, they stared at each other for a long while. While they felt that the old man's plan was quite crude, they believed it to be practical.

Just when the two thought to discuss the matter further with the old man, they suddenly heard a rough, strange roar in the distance along with a chain of explosions.

“The Vivid Glass Beast!”

The two early Core Formation cultivators glanced at each other and yelled out the demon beast's name at nearly the same time. Pleasant surprise was displayed on their faces.

The bony old man's face grew stern. He coldly said to the two, “That is the Vivid Glass Beast's cry without a doubt but it seems someone found it before us. We're going, but conceal yourselves. We'll be acting with discretion.”

After the two tacitly nodded their head, the three Core Formation cultivators flew out as streaks of light. But on their way there, they disappeared without a trace.

As for the Foundation Establishment cultivators, they immediately chased after them with nervous expressions.

After a short moment, the three Core Formation cultivators silently arrived at a coral reef island several kilometers away. It was where the thunderous demon beast's cry had come from.

However, what they saw was beyond their expectations.

There was a sea beast with a sparkling, transparent body that was trapped in a red light barrier.

The demon beast's body was about ten meters long, and had countless milky-white threads hanging from its body. In a dire attempt to cut through the red barrier of light, it continuously

rammed its body against it.

However, this wasn't what the three cultivators were concerned with. They were focused on something else entirely.

There was a youth wearing faint blue robes above the small island. He stood motionlessly in the air with his hands behind his back. His face wore a leisurely expression.

The cultivator with the fierce appearance excitedly said in a voice transmission, "Brother Qiu, that person is only at early Core Formation. Shall we attack?"

A malicious glint appeared in the old man's eyes. However, he managed to suppress his desire to attack and cautiously said, "Don't rush, we'll first take a look around to see if there are any other cultivators hidden nearby. Let's make sure there are no traps!"

The cultivator surnamed Min was also quite careful and called a matter to attention, "Fellow Daoist Xuan, Brother Qiu makes sense. It seems quite suspicious for an early Core Formation cultivator to dare to trap a Vivid Glass Beast by himself. There may be other mysteries at play."

When the fierce-looking man heard this, his heart trembled and he hastily swept his spiritual sense around the vicinity. However, he was unable to find anything.

At that moment, the blue-clothed youth struck.

With a single wave of his hand, seven streaks of azure light shot out from his palm. The streaks of light circled once in the air before combining into a huge azure sword that was over thirty meters long. The sword cleaved down, sending a deep reverberation through air.

The Vivid Glass Beast seemed to perceive the sword's fearsomeness and spat a white crystal orb at it.

The crystal orb swelled to three meters wide after it left the

demon beast's mouth, and moved to intercept the huge falling sword. The sword didn't change speed in the slightest and emitted a faint roll of thunder as it continued down. It then met the crystal with a large bang.

For a single instant, the huge sword appeared indistinct.

Woosh. With a flash of azure light, the huge sword then disappeared without a trace and reappeared atop the Vivid Glass Beast as it continued to cleave down.

The demon beast then hoarsely shouted in fury as its countless white threads joined together to meet the strike in an attempt to preserve its life.

Crunch. The huge sword chopped through the Vivid Glass Beast's head without the slightest resistance, splattering green blood all around.

The three Core Formation cultivators were left amazed at the sight of the youth slaying the beast in a mere instant.

Was that really a Vivid Glass beast? It was well-known to be extremely difficult to hunt even amongst grade six demon beasts. But it just fell to a single blow from this youth. Inconceivable! Could it be that he wasn't at the early Core Formation stage, but was rather at the late Core Formation Stage?

After repeatedly using their spiritual sense to sweep past the youth as he looted the beast corpse, they confirmed that he truly was but an early Core Formation cultivator.

While victory against the grade six Vivid Glass Beast would be certain with the three of them combined, it would be impossible for them to slay it with the ease displayed by this youth. Could it be that this youth was a tiger in disguise? Could he be concealing his true cultivation with a hidden technique?

Suspicious began to surge within their minds!

Chapter 525: A Fearsome and Resounding Reputation

“Brother Qiu, do we attack? It seems like he’s really alone.” The fierce-looking man’s voice held a trace of nervousness.

The gaunt old man stared at him with a doubtful expression, but didn’t reply.

When the three saw the youth take out a black alms bowl and start to extract the Vivid Glass Beast’s soul, their expressions greatly changed with a trace of fear appearing within their eyes.

The cultivator surnamed Min saw the old man’s hesitation and couldn’t help but frown. He probingly said, “This person is quite odd. How about we leave him be? There is no need to provoke any mysterious characters.”

As the three had managed to survive in the Scattered Star Seas for such a long time, they were naturally very cautious people. The scene before them was, without a doubt, indescribably strange. It even caused Cultivator Min to recoil!

The old man’s gaze wandered for a long while before he bitterly smiled, and listlessly said, “Leave him be? This is no longer a matter of choosing to attack him, but rather, how we will leave here alive.”

These words caused the fierce-looking man and Cultivator Min to freeze. They were fully aware of the old man’s temperament and knew that he wouldn’t say something like this without reason. As such, they soon revealed astonishment.

The old man licked his lips and spoke with an agonized whisper, “You two might not have noticed, but doesn’t this person resemble the recent rumors of that devil?”

“Devil? Then could he be...?”

“So it was him!”

The two immediately let out a cry of alarm. Their faces were aghast!

The old man solemnly muttered as if he were speaking to himself, “Absolutely. He appears young, can release several flying swords, and moreover, his sword light is azure. Just like the rumors!”

The fierce-looking man’s complexion turned white. He said with a trembling voice, “Wasn’t that person also well-known to use a swarm of flying insects? He hasn’t revealed them since we’ve arrived. That can’t be a coincidence!” It appeared he had been shaken stiff by the old man’s words.

Cultivator Min turned slightly green and sent out a voice transmission in a whisper, “Brother Qiu’s words are correct. This devil ordinarily reveals himself to be at early Core Formation and is fond of extracting the souls of demon beasts. The reason why he hasn’t release his flying insects should be that he didn’t feel the need to!”

“You’re saying that this guy is the rumored ‘Insect Devil’? Then why are we still here? If we face him, we’re certain to perish.” The fierce-looking man appeared to be panic-stricken.

The old man managed to regain his calm and said, “Don’t lose your head! Even if it truly is the Insect Devil, his attention was occupied with the Vivid Glass Beast when we arrived. As a result, we had remained undiscovered. Now that he has killed the demon beast, we will expose ourselves if we act rashly.”

The other two glanced at each other and saw the sense in the old man’s words. As such, they didn’t dare to act impulsively.

As the large man stared at the youth extracting the demon beast’s soul, something suddenly came to mind. He whispered with a doubtful expression, “I heard that four years ago, the Insect Devil

contended for a grade seven demon beast against a group of nine Core Formation cultivators. He managed to kill eight of the Core Formation cultivators by himself, but a single late Core Formation cultivator was fortunately able to escape. Could those rumors be true?”

Cultivator Min dryly swallowed a few times before whispering, “They should be! The man who survived was an expert from the Jade Cloud Sect, and the ones who died were his fellow Sect Members. That fight caused the Jade Cloud Sect, once renowned as one of the five great powers of Wondrous Depths Island, to lose an entire third of their forces. The Jade Cloud Sect’s Chief Elder, Daoist Master Swift Crane, was enraged by this and personally scoured the seas several times by himself in search of the insect demon. However, he returned unsuccessful each time. Many people believed even if he found the Insect Devil, nothing would come of it. After all, from the abilities he displayed, it is quite possible that he is actually a newly ascended Nascent Soul Expert. It is said that the other factions of Wondrous Depths Island have already taken note of the Insect Devil and wish to recruit him.”

After a moment of silence, the old man shook his head and said, “Nascent Soul Stage? Not necessarily. I’ve heard that there is nothing exceptional about the insect demon’s cultivation; all of his fearsomeness comes completely from his strange insects. It was said that on the day of that battle, he hadn’t used any magic treasures and merely released countless flying insects, devouring the many Core Formation cultivators alive without even lifting a finger. That was how he received the name of Insect Devil.”

Cultivator Min persisted, “However, Brother Qiu also saw that he didn’t use his insects and was able to kill Vivid Glass Beast in a single strike. Even late Core Formation cultivators would find it difficult to replicate this feat. Surely he must be a disguised Nascent Soul eccentric.”

The old man still disapproved and thought to further speak when

the fierce-looking man at the side interrupted him with a helpless tone, "Fellow Daoists, it makes no difference for us whether or not he is a Nascent Soul cultivator. It is almost certain that he would be able to kill us with great ease. Even we are fearful of his evil reputation; it is said that all cultivators who encountered the Insect Devil were all devoured by his insects. The number of cultivators that have fallen by his hand is no less than a hundred. In the last two years, this devil has already become a topic of fear."

Cultivator Min appeared even more unsightly after hearing this. His gaze fell onto the blue-clothed youth and he let out a long breath before saying, "The Insect Devil is truly vicious and bloodthirsty. It should be true without a doubt. There were no small number of cultivators that had been killed for their treasures, and all claim it to be the work of this devil! And to think we came knocking on his door!" His voice was filled with regret.

When the old man heard this, his face also became unsightly, but he spoke no more. He was also greatly fearful toward the evil reputation of the Insect Devil.

In the following moments, the three ceased to use voice transmissions and silently watched the youth's every movement. They wished for him to quickly finish dealing with the demon beast so they could get away as soon as possible.

At that moment, the blue-clothed youth finished drawing out the soul of the Vivid Glass beast into the black alms bowl. He then rummaged through the demon beast's corpse for a white demon core.

At that moment, the youth suddenly raised his head and glanced around.

When the three saw this, they all held their breaths and kept their bodies perfectly still.

However, the situation developed contrary to their wishes.

The youth's gaze suddenly turned to the direction that the three were hiding in. With a slight sneer on his face, he coldly said, "You three Fellow Daoists have been watching me for quite some time. Have you had enough to look at? How about you come out and show yourselves?"

Having heard this, the three suddenly felt a chill run down their spines!

"Run!" It was unknown which of the three shouted this, but they immediately flew off as streaks of light and split off in three different directions in a panic-stricken manner.

The blue-clothed youth frowned and muttered, "I haven't even finished speaking yet. Why did they flee with such fear? Did they fear that I would eat them?" A trace of confusion appeared on his face.

But soon after, the youth waved his arms with a sullen expression, and sent three spirit beast pouches into the air, filling the sky with a torrent of tri-colored beetles.

This youth was obviously Han Li, who had just returned from the far seas.

The old man stealthily peeked his head around only to find a scene that left him aghast, causing him to unconsciously speed up.

At that moment, a series of soft sounds leisurely left Han Li's mouth.

When the tri-colored beetles heard him, they gathered towards the sky and instantly condensed into three huge lances spanning about three meters each. Then with a sharp and loud whistle, the three lances blurred with brilliant light and separately shot out with miraculous speed.

In an instant, the lances tore through the sky, disappearing into the horizon and chasing down the three cultivators that had fled.

Han Li stood in place without any intention of chasing after

them. Instead, he started to leisurely skin the translucent Vivid Glass Beast with a streak of azure light.

The hide of the Vivid Glass Beast was a top-grade material for refining armor. He naturally wasn't about to give it up. Then after turning the rest of the remains to ashes, Han Li retrieved the Rainbow Skirt Grass and his spell formation setup tools from the coral island.

Just as he finished this, three flashes of light appeared on the horizon and flew in Han Li's direction. After they grew closer to him, he was able to clearly see that they were the three cultivators that previously fled.

These three cultivators all had tri-colored collars around their necks. Their pale faces wore expressions of crestfallen resignation.

Han Li grasped his chin as he saw this, but he secretly smiled in his heart.

After the three meekly fell before Han Li, he smiled and asked them with an exceptionally friendly tone, "May I ask you three Fellow Daoists, why you so flusteredly ran away from me? Could it be that you three recognize me?"

Chapter 526: Interrogation

Upon hearing Han Li, the three couldn't help but look at each other in amazement. What was the insect devil's purpose in asking them why they were afraid of him? Could it be that he wished to amuse himself before he killed them?

The fierce-looking man steeled his heart and said with open hostility, "If Fellow Daoist wishes to take our lives, then do so! What use is there in talking?"

"That is strange. Was there something wrong with my question?" Han Li's expression suddenly grew sullen and cold.

Seeing that there was possibly a chance of survival, the cultivator surnamed Min persistently pleaded, "Us brothers didn't know that Senior was hunting demon beasts here. Otherwise, we wouldn't have dared to disturb Senior Insect Devil. We rushed to this location unintentionally without even a sliver of hostile intent. I hope Senior will spare us." It appeared a trace of blood had returned to his face.

Han Li frowned and a trace of confusion flickered from his face, "Insect Devil? That's what you call me?"

When the gaunt old man heard this, he couldn't help but wear a bewildered expression, muttering, "You're not Senior Insect Devil?"

"It seems you three Fellow Daoists have misunderstood something." Han Li chuckled and after some hesitation, he waved his arm and three azure lights flew towards their collars. With a low-pitched hum, the collars scattered, returning them back into a swarm of countless beetles. The beetles then returned back to the spirit beast pouches at Han Li's waist.

The three rejoiced at being spared from death. Although they were confused, they felt somewhat convinced they had mistakenly

identified him. There would be no way the Insect Devil would do something so unfathomable, given his notorious reputation. But after seeing Han Li's astonishing display of ability, they didn't dare to take any rash actions and respectfully addressed him.

The old man wore a smile and promptly said, "Hehe! It seems we were mistaken. There would be no way that the Insect Devil would've let us off so easily. May I know your esteemed name, Fellow Daoist?" Although the old man understood that the youth before him might not be the Insect Devil, his abilities were quite similar, and he could still take their lives with ease. He naturally didn't dare to slight him.

When Han Li heard this, he thought to say something, but he soon turned his head to the skies.

Han Li leisurely spoke as he stared at the sky, "Oh! It seems you three had companions, and they've just arrived."

The old man paused for a moment before turning his head in a certain direction. But since he didn't catch sight of anything, a trace of confusion appeared on his face.

Doubtful, the old man honestly replied, "Us brothers did bring along a few of our disciples. I reckon this is about the time that they should arrive!" Just as he finished saying this, a string of lights suddenly appeared off in the horizon. They were the Foundation Establishment cultivators that they had left behind.

They had chased after the three Core Formation cultivators at a comparatively sluggish pace on their magic tools.

When the old man saw this, his expression changed. This had illustrated that the youth possessed spiritual sense far beyond his own. His fear of Han Li unconsciously grew.

Han Li glanced at the three Core Formation Cultivators with narrowed eyes and cryptically said, "I'm not one for crowds. How about you make arrangements for your disciples, and I'll wait for

you three on the other end of the island. I still have a few questions I wish to ask you. I hope you won't leave without saying goodbye." He then smiled at them and flew to the far end of the island below them.

The three let out sighs of relief. Although they didn't know whether or not the youth was truly the Insect Devil, it appeared that he currently didn't have any plans of killing them. Their lives were safe for the time being.

As a result, the old man solemnly uttered a few words. Cultivator Min nodded his head and took to the skies. After the group of disciples arrived, he coldly gave a few words and had the cultivators slowly descend to the side of the island.

At that moment, Cultivator Min then worriedly returned to the old man's side.

After Cultivator Min arrived, the fierce-looking man hesitantly asked in a voice transmission, "Brother Qiu, must we go?"

With a change of expression, the old man solemnly warned, "Fellow Daoist Xuan, don't think of anything ridiculous. Did you not just witness what he was capable of? Do you truly believe we will be able to escape him? Just give an honest answer to anything he asks, but do not provoke him by any means. Treat him exactly as you would a Nascent Soul cultivator. With his abilities, he should feel disdainful towards killing us."

Brother Min nodded his head and said, "Brother Qiu makes sense. I also can't make out this person to be the evil, bloodthirsty sort. It would be better to not take any rash actions."

Although the fierce-looking man wasn't entirely in favor of this, he reconsidered after hearing them.

Soon after, the three obediently flew over to the far side of the island.

Han Li was sitting down cross-legged on flat coral, calmly waiting

for them.

Han Li casually beckoned to the three with a calm expression and said, “Fellow Daoists, how about we sit down and have a chat! Tell me about the recent happenings near Wondrous Depths Island. I’ve just returned from the far seas, and I’ve encountered several groups of cultivators in the recent days. From what I remember, cultivators should rarely tread in these seas. Why aren’t cultivators hunting demon beasts in the depths? Naturally, I’d also like a detailed explanation on the matter of this ‘Insect Devil’.”

The three became increasingly uneasy upon seeing Han Li’s calm appearance. They respectfully agreed and carefully sat down nearby.

The old man bitterly smiled and slowly said, “It’s been two years since we’ve been to Wondrous Depths Island. At that time, the Wondrous Depths had already become a restricted area. One can no longer hunt demon beasts in the depths. In fact, whenever it is discussed, everyone turns pale.”

With an unchanged expression, Han Li softly said, “Oh? Please explain, Fellow Daoist!”

The old man felt relaxed upon seeing that Han Li was intent on listening. Then after some thought, he gave an honest collection of what had happened, “This matter is actually quite a long story. Two years ago, the demon beasts violently emerged...”

Han Li quietly listened until the old man had finished. He then unconsciously frowned and muttered to himself, “According to what you’ve said, the insurrection of demon beasts in the depths killed no small number of high grade cultivators. Even Nascent Soul cultivators are unable to withstand the depths. It is no wonder that the other regions of the seas have so many cultivators!”

Although Han Li didn’t show it on his face, the old man’s recollection had truly shocked him. The demon beasts of the

depths went berserk! Even Nascent Soul cultivators are unable to return after entering. Everything that he heard seemed to point to disaster. Could it be that a great war was about to erupt in the Outer Star Seas?

Han Li paused for a moment before asking with an interested tone, “So how about telling me about that Insect Devil business? After you three saw me, you believed me to be this Insect Devil. Could it be that person is quite similar to me?”

When the three heard this, they couldn’t help but exchange glances at each other.

The old man dryly coughed and answered, “How do I say this? At first glance, Fellow Daoist looks very similar to the rumored Insect Devil. He uses azure flying swords, has a young appearance, and also appears to only have an early Core Formation cultivation. Additionally, he can also control over a thousand flying insects...”

But as he continued speaking, his voice unconsciously grew soft. Because no matter how he saw it, this youth completely matched the details of the rumored Insect Devil. Even Cultivator Min’s confidence was wavering.

Although a trace of surprise appeared from Han Li’s eyes, he calmly said, “Huh? That does sound quite like me. Fellow Daoist should be a bit more specific! What has the Insect Devil been doing? It seems his reputation is quite large.”

Cultivator Min carefully answered, “There are many events related to the Insect Devil, but the most famous among them was when he used his insect swarm to kill eight Core Formation cultivators four years ago. That was when he became famous.”

Although his face didn’t show it, Han Li felt his heart drop.

“After that battle, the Insect Devil vanished without a trace. A year after that, near Wondrous Depths Island, cultivators began to be hunted down for their treasures. According to the survivors, it

was all the doing of the Insect Devil. He would control the insects to fill the skies and cleanly devour his victims. This would occur every other month or so. According to the rumors, no less than a hundred cultivators have fallen at his hands. This was how the Insect Devil acquired such a fearsome and resounding reputation.” After all that was said, Cultivator Min wore a trace of nervousness and unease on his face.

Chapter 527: The True Insect Devil

Not only did the cultivator surnamed Min appear fearful, but the gaunt old man and the fierce-looking man were also filled with trepidation, not knowing whether or not those words would anger the youth before them. They were completely unsure about whether or not this person was the Insect Devil.

“Interesting, it seems this Insect Devil is quite notorious. Do you Fellow Daoists know the appearance of the Insect Devil or the type of insects that he uses?” Not only was Han Li not angry, but he smiled instead.

Cultivator Min started to mumble, “What he looks like? I’ve never heard of that before. It seems his appearance is quite ordinary. As for the insects he controls, they should be both gold and silver,” when he said this, Cultivator Min couldn’t help but shout out, “Yi! Fellow Daoist controls tri-colored beetles. It seems Senior truly isn’t the Insect Devil!”

The other two suddenly recalled this and felt their spirits rise.

If this person truly wasn’t the Insect Devil, then they would be far more likely to survive.

Han Li then looked up to the sky as if deep in thought. A short moment later, he lowered his head and said, “Many thanks to Fellow Daoists for telling me the truth. Since I still have matters to attend to, I can’t stay any further. However, I hope you will keep our encounter today between ourselves. I don’t wish to be mistaken as the Insect Devil and be pursued. I hope you can understand!” The three were wildly delighted by his words.

Suppressing the excitement in his heart, the old man expectantly probed, “This is only natural. We will definitely keep our mouths shut about this, and won’t cause any problems for you. Well then, us brothers will now be taking our leave.”

Han Li nodded with a faint smile and the three immediately saluted Han Li with concealed joy. They then hastily stood up and flew away.

A moment later on the other side of the island, the three brought along their disciples in an impatient rush to get away from the island.

At an unknown time, Han Li stood up and remained still as he watched them fly off. After they disappeared, Han Li's face suddenly became sullen.

Although exterminating the whole group of cultivators would've been an easy task, Han Li had no interest in attacking them. He wasn't the blood-thirsty sort after all. Besides, it wouldn't have made much of a difference whether or not his whereabouts were leaked.

This location was extremely far away from his cave residence. Had he encountered the three near the misty island, he definitely wouldn't have let them go. In addition, he had already made plans to hastily return to his cave residence and enter seclusion for at least thirty years. He didn't want to waste time out in the Outer Star Seas while there were people in pursuit of him!

However, it seems they had given him quite the nefarious name of the Insect Devil.

There was a time where he had found himself in a helpless position and was forced to unleash his Gold Devour Beetles to kill the Jade Cloud Sect cultivators, but there was never an occurrence where he had killed others to seize their treasures. Someone was clearly framing him.

Although this didn't cause Han Li to become seething with anger, it did very much vex him.

After some thought, he came to the conclusion that this was likely the doing of the only enemy he had in the Outer Star Seas,

the Jade Cloud Sect.

During the time when Han Li was still fearful of high grade demon beasts and had to yet stray too deeply into the Outer Star Seas, he had used the Rainbow Skirt Grass to continuously lure in demon beasts and slay them for their cores. As a result, he managed to lure in a grade seven demon beast. Just as this happened, a group of nine Core Formation cultivators ran into him. They arrogantly proclaimed themselves as the Jade Cloud Sect, and thought to give in to their avarice and slay him for his treasure. As such, Han Li could only release his many Gold Devouring Beetles to kill them and protect himself.

Although he naturally thought it would be best to kill them all after reaching that point, he didn't expect that the late Core Formation cultivator among them actually possessed an ancient protective treasure of impressive strength. As a result, he alone had managed to escape the Gold Devouring Beetles, catching Han Li off guard.

As Han Li knew that the Jade Cloud Sect was one of the great powers of Wondrous Depths Island, he could only brave the dangers of heading into the far reaches of the sea to avoid any powerful enemies that sought him out.

It could be said that Han Li had been quite lucky. In the several years that he had spent in the far seas, he hadn't encountered any demon beasts of grade eight or higher. His most dangerous encounter had been when he attracted several grade seven demon beasts at once. Although the situation had left him at a loss, the simultaneous release of his Gold Devouring Beetles and magic treasures managed to settle the problem without much trouble.

In his hunting during these past years, he eventually acquired several hundred grade six and seven demon beast cores, more than enough for his medicinal recipes. Additionally, he also accumulated a large collection of demon beast materials.

As such, he felt satisfied with ending his expedition and returning back to his cave residence.

However, just as he returned from the deep seas, he unintentionally discovered a Vivid Glass Beast as he passed by these waters. Han Li didn't intend on letting it slip away and placed down a formation to trap it. However, he didn't expect that this would attract the gaunt old man and his two companions. They even called him 'Insect Demon' in a panicked manner.

This caused Han Li's mood to take a turn for the worse. It was more than likely that since the Jade Cloud Sect was unable to find him, they had incited rumors of an 'Insect Devil' using his likeness and penchant for controlling insects and his Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords.

It was clear that they had intended to destroy his reputation and deny him any place in the Outer Star Seas, forcing him to appear. They even sent people to impersonate him and slay other cultivators for their treasures in the process, managing to kill two birds with one stone!

However, there was still something that Han Li couldn't wrap his mind around.

It wasn't difficult to find high grade cultivators that were skilled in controlling insects. Finding flying insects that appeared similar to Gold Devouring Beetles also wasn't particularly difficult. But if this was truly the fault of the Jade Cloud Sect, why did the impersonators use gold and silver insects? He had used his black-tainted Gold Devouring Beetles to kill the Jade Cloud Sect. The lone cultivator that had escaped definitely wouldn't have made such a mistake. However, the change in color for his Gold Devouring Beetles was something that had only occurred after he had arrived in the Outer Star Seas.

Could it be... the old eccentrics from Heavenvoid Hall had tracked him down here?

When Han Li carefully considered it, he felt his heart tremble. His complexion unconsciously paled. If this were true, the situation would be far from good.

After standing still for a moment more and calmly muttering to himself, Han Li suddenly stamped his foot down and shot towards the sky. Soon after, he streaked across the sky in azure light, heading towards the direction of his small island in the mist.

As Han Li flew, he wore his ordinary expression apart from a cold sneer that appeared on his mouth.

Just now, he had come to an understanding. Regardless of whether this was the result of the machinations of the Jade Cloud Sect or the Nascent Soul eccentrics, there was no point in spending too much thought on the matter of the 'Insect Devil'. This was because with the development of the strange situation of the Wondrous Depths, his original plan of prolonged, secluded cultivation was now even more advantageous. This course of action would allow him to avoid both the lurking and the upcoming dangers in the Outer Star Seas.

And after he increased his cultivation, who would dare to apprehend him even if his notorious reputation remained? In the cultivation world, strength always spoke the loudest!

With that in mind, Han Li continued on his way without even a sliver of hesitation remaining in his heart.

Meanwhile in Blackrock City, there were two people in a hidden room, speaking to each other in a mysterious manner.

"Brother Qi, it has already been three years. Your methods have been ineffective. I am not going to waste another eight years just for that youngster to take the bait!" The clear voice spoke with a tone of clear impatience.

"Fellow Daoist Wu, you can't be hasty with these matters. Don't you also sweep your spiritual sense over every corner of Blackrock

City day after day? If that person actually appeared in the city with a disguise, he definitely wouldn't have been able to slip past Brother Wu's eyes." The other person spoke with a hoarse and deep voice.

The first person who spoke was astonishingly Zenith Yin, who hadn't been seen for years! He was speaking to a pale middle-aged man with a sullen expression. He appeared dissatisfied.

"Humph! Does Brother Qi's method of sending disciples to masquerade as the youngster robbing others serve another purpose? Brother Qi doesn't have another purpose in mind that he is deliberately hiding from me? I can't believe that finding a single early Core Formation cultivator could be so hard for a sect as large as your Jade Cloud Sect." Zenith Yin said with an annoyed expression.

"Sigh! Brother Wu's words wrong me. We weren't friends for only one or two years. How could I possibly do that? Moreover, our sect also holds a deep enmity with him. We've never stopped trying to find him." The owner of the hoarse voice was a middle-aged Daoist priest wearing a robe adorned with white cranes. His face had white pockmarks and was covered in a layer of warm fluorescence, making for quite an imposing visage. He then smiled as if he had thought of something and said, "However, Fellow Daoist Wu, I am quite curious. Just what did the youngster do to cause you to brave the risk of sneaking into Heavenly Star City and teleporting here? Fellow Daoist Wu has always used his grandson's death as an excuse. However, it was always stated so casually that I'm very much in doubt."

Chapter 528: Flowing Undercurrents

When Zenith Yin heard Daoist Priest Qi accuse him of hiding something, he inwardly frowned and cursed, ‘Cunning old fox’. However, none of this was betrayed on his face.

Zenith Yin’s expression grew stern and he coldly said, “Brother Qi, you’ve asked this more than once before. And each time, I’ve answered that this Youngster Han treacherously killed my grandson in Heavenvoid Hall. That is why I must capture him alive, so that I may refine his soul.”

The Daoist priest shook his head and said, “Hehe! Brother Wu had been saying this for the past two years, and I do believe it. However, Brother Wu has spent such a long time here, unwilling to be distracted by both his Profound Yin Island and the Starfall Coalition’s battle on the other side. If it were only for the sake of avenging your grandson, then wouldn’t I alone be enough?”

Then as if checkmating him, the Daoist priest stared at Zenith Yin with a mysterious smile and slowly continued, “Moreover, in addition to Zenith Yin, the Thousand Gates of Enlightenment has secretly sent over their Elder Breakwater, and three other unknown Nascent Soul cultivators had arrived in the Outer Star Seas with disguised appearances. Just when did our Wondrous Depths Island become so attractive that it would capture the attention of so many high grade cultivators? And in the past two days, I’ve acquired concrete information that they’re looking for the same person as you, the youngster surnamed Han. Brother Wu, please don’t tell me that they also wish to avenge their grandsons!”

Zenith Yin’s heart trembled and his face grew icy, but he remained silent.

The Daoist Priest saw that Zenith Yin’s heart was wavering and he calmly continued to persuade him, “There is no need for Brother Wu to pointlessly continue to conceal this. Regardless of

what great secret this Youngster Han may possess, since so many fellow Nascent Soul Daoists have already figured it out, there is no harm in having me and only me know about it. If Brother Wu were to calmly tell me, it could work to your advantage. Moreover, in the current seas, in addition to my own disciples masquerading as the Insect Devil, there are other cultivators that have also taken up that identity in other locations. It is clear that they're interfering with our scheme."

Zenith Yin eventually replied with a gloomy tone, "Humph! Brother Qi, since you already know so much, then what mystery is there to clear up? What point is there in asking me?"

"I am convinced that even if Brother Wu is unwilling to tell me the truth, I will be able to find the clear truth of the matter by the year's end. By that time, it won't just be me or the Jade Cloud Sect that knows of the matter. I don't want things to reach that point. Wouldn't it be better to join hands now?" The Daoist Priest spoke of his inner plans without the slightest attempt at concealment.

Zenith Yin's expression fluctuated for a long while. After lowering his head and muttering to himself for a moment, he eventually sighed and bitterly smiled at the Daoist priest. "It's not that I wished to deliberately fool you. But in order to ensure that the secret wouldn't be divulged, I along with several other Fellow Daoists have all made a heart demon pact to not speak of it to outsiders. But since the Myriad Gates of Enlightenment has sent their Elder Breakwater here, then Wan Tianming has more or less broken the pact, regardless of what he said. Hence, I no longer have anything to fear from divulging the secret."

The Daoist priest heartily laughed upon hearing him, "Great. Brother Wu actually cared about a heart demon pact? I've never taken them to mind. If heart demon pacts were truly effective, most heretical and Devil Dao cultivators would already be dead."

Zenith Yin said with a helpless tone, "Although I don't care about the heart demons, if too many people come to know of it, I'm

afraid there will be no rewards left to reap.” Soon after, his face stiffened, and he started to speak through voice transmissions.

The Daoist priest was completely unconcerned with Zenith Yin’s carefulness. But after only a few words were spoken, his expression greatly changed as rapt excitement flickered in his eyes.

“Is what you said true? The item has emerged into the world?” The Daoist Priest’s voice shivered from excitement.

Zenith Yin indifferently replied, “If not for this treasure, do you truly believe so many Nascent Soul cultivators would have gathered here?”

While the Daoist priest was ecstatic, he couldn’t help but grumble, “That’s right! It seems Brother Wu was correct in entirely concealing the matter! I admire you for having kept this secret for so long, but if Fellow Daoist had spoke of it sooner, I would’ve certainly sent out more men. Perhaps we might’ve found the youngster already.”

Zenith Yin gloomily explained, “Fellow Daoist says that quite easily. Do you think I could just divulge this matter as I wished? If I hadn’t concealed the matter for so long, the others might have leaked the information as well. Even now, I am unwilling to casually speak of it. The less people who know of this, the better.”

The Daoist priest nodded his head and agreed without thinking, “Brother Wu’s words make sense! If I had known about this, I also wouldn’t have wanted to divide the treasure with anybody else.”

“However, it seems that now, the information won’t be hidden for much longer. The truth of the treasure’s emergence will finally be spread.” Zenith Yin’s cheek twitched and he revealed a trace of bitterness on his face.

“Hehe! Brother Wu should know that no news truly stays hidden. Now, I will be taking my leave first, since I need to send out more men. Let us be a step ahead of the others in search of that

youngster.” The Daoist priest stood up and bid goodbye with a trace of excitement on his face.

Zenith Yin didn’t do anything to stop him. After standing up and cupping his fist to him, he watched the Daoist priest as he left the room.

Zenith Yin then sat back down in his chair and remained motionless with a bitter smile on his face. Ever since the word “advantage” was uttered, Daoist Priest Qi had become more energetic while Zenith became anxious. But it seemed that telling him about the Heavenvoid Cauldron was the right move. That Youngster Han had fled to some unknown location and had left no trace of himself. Had Han Li not exterminated the Jade Cloud cultivators, Zenith Yin would’ve believed that Han Li had successfully executed a crafty escape plan, and actually escaped to another demon beast island. But since he no longer had the time to wait, he could only draw support from a local power, the Jade Cloud Sect. He could only take this one step at a time.

Zenith Yin pondered about the benefits and drawbacks of this alliance before letting out a long sigh, returning the room to silence.

...

In another portion of the sea, an azure-robed youth with an ordinary appearance was coldly glancing at some low grade cultivators with utter disdain. There was a swarm of gold-silver insects buzzing above his head.

“Insect Devil!” A middle-aged cultivator among the group shouted out the name in fright.

When the youth heard this, he coldly chuckled and wordlessly pointed at them, causing the insect cloud to immediately spread across the skies.

Although these low grade cultivators did their utmost to protect

themselves with magic treasures, they were completely covered by the flying insects in an instant. After only a moment of time, the cultivators completely disappeared without a trace.

The youth picked up the storage pouches that were left behind and disapprovingly said, "You dare to struggle for your lives with your meager cultivation? You overestimate yourselves." He then casually picked a direction and flew off into the distance as a streak of azure light.

A short moment later, white light suddenly flashed from somewhere in the air to reveal an early Core Formation cultivator with a pale face. He glanced in the direction that the youth had disappeared with an unsightly expression. Then with gritted teeth, he flew in the opposite direction.

...

Half a month later, Han Li eventually returned to the small island in this mist. Although he hadn't returned in many years, everything was how he had left it. This finally relieved the worry that he had always carried in the back of his mind.

Han Li first took a few days to rest in his cave residence before arranging the many rare materials and demon cores he had acquired during his recent excursion. After organizing all of them, he then started to prepare for refining pills.

Ten days later, when Han Li felt completely refreshed, he brought all the materials into his pill refining room.

Years ago when he had last refined medicine pills in his cave residence in Heavenly Star City, Han Li felt he had reached a bottleneck in his pill refinement techniques. It seemed he would have to put quite a bit more effort into it if he were to break through into a higher realm of pill refinement. As such, Han Li didn't immediately start refining grade six and seven demon beast cores. Instead, he lined up the grade five demon cores he had acquired by his side.

In Han Li's mind, although his talents in pill refinement were quite ordinary, his pill refinement techniques weren't too far away from that of a pill refinement grandmaster. After all, who else aside from him had the opportunity to practice refining pills with such a luxurious amount of materials. As the Dao of pill refinement mostly relied on experience and skill, Han Li decided to first use the grade five demon cores to see whether or not he could break through his bottleneck in pill refinement techniques.

With these thoughts in mind, Han Li gazed at the furnace before him and waved his arm, causing a grade five demon core to fly into the cauldron. At the same time, the cauldron distanced itself from him.

Chapter 529: Uninvited Guests

The door to the pill refinement room had been sealed for an entire three years when one day, the room finally opened with Han Li quietly emerging from within. All of his valuable demon cores had been turned into demon core pills.

For the first two years, Han Li had used all of his time to refine grade five demon core pills.

Although these medicine pills had no significant effect on his cultivation as of current, even a single one of these pills was immensely desired by Foundation Establishment cultivators; even a single pill would leave them in ecstasy.

After refining these medicine pills, Han Li's pill refinement techniques had finally ascended to a higher level. After all, even genuine pill refinement grandmasters wouldn't have the opportunity to squander as many demon cores for practice as he did. Ordinary pill refinement masters were only able to use about forty demon cores as practice in their lifetime. Even then, it was an infrequent occurrence.

While all the medicine pill refinement methods had their differences, they all shared a few similarities that Han Li was able to recognize. After refining so many of these precious medicine pills, Han Li was able to forcefully raise his pill refinement technique to the rumored level that existed slightly above that of a pill refinement grandmaster. As a result, this greatly increased the odds of success when refining grade six and seven demon cores into pills, much to his delight! Even Han Li was unwilling to lightly squander items as valuable as grade six and seven demon cores.

After Han Li finished refining all of his demon cores, he spent an entire month resting. In that month, Han Li circled around his insect rooms many times, observing the differences between his tri-colored Gold Devouring Beetles and the non-mutated Gold

Devouring Beetles.

While Han Li was refining pills, he had his puppets alternate between feeding Rainbow Skirt Grass to the two groups of Gold Devouring Beetles. However, this had resulted in Han Li discovering something terrible. While the tri-colored Gold Devouring Beetles excitedly consumed Rainbow Skirt Grass as expected, it no longer induced a violent excitement in the tri-colored Gold Devouring Beetles, nor did it produce any other strange effects.

At the beginning, Han Li had assumed that this was because the time had been too short and that the number of Gold Devouring Beetles were too many. Hence, the effects of the Rainbow Skirt Grass wouldn't be obvious. But under further investigation, he specifically isolated three hundred black-strained Gold Devouring Beetles and fed them the Rainbow Skirt Grass, leading to this significant discovery. After consuming the Rainbow Skirt Grass several times, they hadn't displayed even the slightest change.

This caused Han Li to become quite gloomy. He had come to the conclusion that the Rainbow Skirt Grass could no longer be used to induce reproduction in the mutated Gold Devouring Beetles.

Although he didn't understand the unfathomable principles behind this, he knew without a doubt that these black-stained mutated beetles could not be replenished as they had completely lost their ability to rapidly reproduce. Every single beetle he lost would be permanent.

Now, he could only go back to feeding the Rainbow Skirt Grass to the minority of Gold Devouring Beetles that hadn't undergone the black-stained mutation.

After feeding Rainbow Skirt Grass to the unmutated Gold Devouring Beetles repeatedly, they had become increasingly violent, appearing as if they would soon reproduce. With that taken care off, Han Li then entered seclusion once more with

renewed clarity of mind.

With the prepared assistance of all kinds of medicine pills, Han Li planned on first reaching the eighth layer of the Azure Essence Sword Arts before tackling the mid Core Formation stage.

Sitting down on a straw mat in the sealed room, Han Li took out a medicine bottle from his storage pouch, and poured out a glowing red medicine pill into his hand that resembled a longan fruit.

After Han Li swallowed the pill, he began to feel the heat of medicinal power emit from his stomach. He then silently muttered the incantation for the eighth layer of the sword art as he slowly closed his eyes.

Han Li wholeheartedly cultivated in the cave residence while oblivious to the time that passed by.

The unceasing consumption of medicine pills and the conversion of medicinal power into spiritual power was an extremely tedious task. Fortunately, Han Li was wholeheartedly committed to increasing his cultivation and was able to persevere without fail. But even with his stalwart resolve, Han Li began to unconsciously feel dreary.

Sixteen years passed in the blink of an eye. Han Li had managed to eventually break through the mid Core Formation bottleneck and reached the eighth layer of the Azure Essence Sword Arts.

Despite his excitement, he didn't hastily leave seclusion as he still possessed a majority of the medicine pills he had started with. It was only natural to want to finish consuming them. Hence, despite having just entered mid Core Formation, Han Li forcefully calmed his heart and focused on refining the ninth layer of the Azure Sword Arts.

The ninth layer of the sword arts proved to be much more difficult than the previous layers had been.

As spring passed by and winter appeared with autumn leaving and summer arriving, years and years passed by with the secluded room remaining shut. A thick layer of dust began to cover everything in the cave residence as if it had become an ancient tomb!

On yet another peaceful morning in the nearby seas, a seabird circled overhead, occasionally releasing a sharp cry. It made for a serene scene.

But a moment later, a flash of light suddenly appeared from the horizon. Several streaks of azure and red radiance flew towards the direction of the sea mist in a disorderly fashion.

A moment later, silhouettes could clearly be made out from within the light. They were a group of three women and two men. Apart from an early Foundation Establishment cultivator, a middle-aged man, the rest were all Qi Condensation cultivators. They were all youths spanning anywhere from seventeen to twenty-four years of age. They had flustered flown over in a mad rush, occasionally looking behind them as if someone were chasing them.

Gasping for breath, a young woman amongst them said, “Martial Uncle Sun! Let’s rest for a moment in the sea mist. Otherwise, we won’t be able to persist when they come chasing after us.”

The young woman had a round face and large eyes, bearing somewhat of a resemblance to an infant. While she would normally appear quite cute, at the moment, she was covered in sweat, and her complexion was pale as if her magic power was on the verge of exhaustion.

“This...” The middle-aged man paused and looked at the other three Qi Condensation cultivators. Although they appeared to be in a slightly better condition, they didn’t look like they could last for much longer.

After hesitantly looking behind them, he reluctantly agreed,

“Alright, we’ll go into the mist and recover our magic power. Then we will leave immediately after. Although we are a good distance away from them, they are capable of relentlessly chasing after us, so it would be best to be careful. If they manage to overtake us, it will be impossible to survive.”

Each of the youths expressed relief upon hearing this.

Their cultivation was truly shallow. Being able to fly here had already reached the extent of their abilities. Although they knew it would be extremely dangerous to stop, they were unable to do otherwise.

Hence, the party flew into the sea mist.

Not long after the party entered the mist, a burly twenty year old youth hopefully said, “The sea mist is quite dense here. Perhaps we can wait here and conceal ourselves from their pursuit!”

“Don’t even think about it. Although we don’t know how they’re managing to track us down, a bit of fog isn’t about to conceal ourselves from them. Everyone fly lower and see if there are any reefs we can take a rest on. We can recover our magic power faster if we sit.” The middle aged man bluntly refuted him, causing the burly youth to blush and hang his head. The others closely followed after the Foundation Establishment cultivator, not daring to be left behind.

After a short moment, the yellow-clothed young woman suddenly shouted out in surprise, “Yi! There’s an island here!”

Regardless of the woman’s yell, the island was clearly visible after they deeply entered the deep fog. They couldn’t help but look at each other in dismay.

A blue-clothed woman with an ordinary appearance said with fear, “Could there be some sort of demon beast here?”

The middle-aged man started to hesitate but he soon came to a firm resolution, “Something that unfortunate can’t occur. And

even if it did, we wouldn't be able to deal with it, so there is no point thinking about it. Quickly, head to the island and recover your magic power!"

When the others heard this, they didn't say anything further and floated down onto the small island.

The middle-aged man released his spiritual sense after landing on the island. He then happily pointed and said, "Let's sit down over there! The spiritual Qi over there is quite abundant."

The direction that he pointed to was the sole mountain range of the island. When the party heard this, their spirits were roused.

Afterwards, the middle-aged man led the way with the rest of the party hurrying after him. If they could recover enough magic power, they might be able to escape the oncoming calamity. They naturally weren't going to let go of this chance.

After a short moment, the party arrived at the green mountain range and casually sat down on the small mountain. They all held a spirit stone in hand and began to slowly meditate, absorbing the dense spiritual Qi nearby.

Chapter 530: Azure Spirit Sect

Apart from the wind that carried the scent of the sea, it was completely silent where the group of cultivators were recuperating. The party of cultivators became increasingly relaxed, gathering the courage to close their eyes.

Time quickly passed by. After two hours, the party had recovered most of their magic power and their complexions had mostly returned to normal.

The middle-aged man opened his eyes. After examining how the other four were doing, he immediately commanded, “We’re going. We can’t stay here stay longer! Those things are already in quick pursuit of us.” With that said, he stood up and led the way.

Although the Qi Condensation cultivators were somewhat reluctant, they didn’t dare to tarry and stood up, quickly flying off on their magic tools. But at that moment, loud cries could suddenly be heard from around the island. They seemed to be coming from within the dense mist.

“Not good!” The middle-aged cultivator yelled with a ghastly expression. The other four’s complexions paled in an instant.

A flock of over a dozen huge grey birds emerged from the dense fog above them. These monstrous birds were three-meters-long, had red combs on their head, sharp claws and beaks, and emitted a faint azure light from their body. They made for a vicious and ugly sight.

After they appeared, they didn’t immediately descend down to the island. Instead, they quickly circled around the island before dispersing, blocking the cultivator’s paths of escape. The birds appeared quite familiar with the maneuver.

When the middle-aged cultivator saw this, his heart dropped.

“Run! Quickly go into the forest. Wait until there is a chance to

escape!” Experienced in dealing with bird-type demon beasts, the middle-aged man hastily ordered the others to flee into the forest. As the four were scared out of their wits, they quickly followed his orders without question.

Their speed reached new levels with their increasing panic. In the blink of an eye, they had already arrived at the forest.

However, a shocking scene suddenly appeared.

Just as the five flew down to ten meters above the forest, green light suddenly flashed before their eyes. Once they recovered their sight from the dazzling flash, they were amazed to discover that the forest had disappeared without a trace, only to be replaced by an unfamiliar mountain range emitting an astonishing intensity of spiritual Qi.

“It was an illusion formation!” The blue-clothed woman shouted out in alarm.

“Could it be that there is a Fellow Daoist here?” The burly youth said in pleasant surprise.

Greatly surprised, the middle-aged cultivator muttered, “It’s possible! But in any case, this is our chance at survival. Hopefully we can use to formation to evade the Hawk Kite Beasts!”

With that said, the party couldn’t help but sweep their gazes around within the illusion formation.

At that moment, the vicious birds suddenly lost sight of them, causing them to become restless. They cried out to each other several times before deciding to slowly fly downward.

The middle-aged cultivator’s expression sank. “Not good! It seems the Hawk Kite Beasts will soon be unaffected by the illusion formation’s influence. Quickly climb the mountains! There is an aura of spell formations there. Perhaps that is where the Fellow Daoist is.” He then flew off toward the mountains in a streak of light.

After the remaining cultivators mutually glanced at once another, they chased after the middle-aged man with nervous expressions.

After they flew a short distance, a layer of white light suddenly revealed itself, blocking their way.

When the middle-aged man saw this, he rejoiced. He immediately waved his hand and summoned a sound transmission talisman. After muttering a few words into it, he tossed the talisman before it transformed into a streak of fire, disappearing into the light barrier in the blink of an eye. The others gazed at the scene with panicked eyes, not daring to interrupt him.

A short moment later, the many monstrous birds flew into the illusion formation. They quickly discovered the party of cultivators and flew towards them in a mad rush. Their wings carried a faint trace of bright azure light.

The middle-aged cultivator grimaced and glanced at the white light barrier behind them. He gritted his teeth and muttered orders to the Qi Condensation cultivators.

The other cultivator's expression were also unsightly. But they still brandished their glowing magic tools in preparation to receive the demon beasts' attack.

But just as the Hawk Kite Beasts were about to sweep down onto the party of cultivators, something unexpected occurred.

Over a hundred beams of various colored light suddenly shot out from the white light barrier. Although the beams were as thick as a finger, each of them were incomparably sharp. In the next instant, the descending Hawk Kite Beasts were left filled with countless holes, accompanied by the sounds of their flesh being ripped apart.

The demon beasts breathed their last as they fell to the ground without even a scream.

“This is...”

The group of cultivators were elated by the developments and couldn't help but turn around towards the light barrier.

They were left shocked for a long while when they saw over ten huge apes on the other side of the light barrier. At first glance, they had mistaken them to be demon beasts and were left frightened, but they soon noticed something odd about them. After further inspection, they noticed that the huge apes all glowed with black light, before eventually figuring them out to be mechanical puppets. The puppets each had raised arms. It appeared the beam of lights from a moment ago should've all come from their hands.

These realizations left the party completely relieved.

Soon after, the huge apes silently lowered their arms and flickered with white light before disappearing from sight.

As their expressions continued to change in surprise, the white barrier flashed several times before parting to create a three meter wide path.

When the five saw this, they looked at each other in dismay.

A man's voice unhurriedly said, "I am currently in seclusion, and it is inconvenient for me to meet with you. You Fellow Daoists may rest for a moment within the barrier before leaving!" From his words, it seemed the formation spell master didn't possess the slightest intention to meet them.

"Many thanks for Senior's kindness. But since the demon beasts have died, it will be fine if we rested outside. We don't dare to further interrupt Senior's cultivation!" Although the middle-aged cultivator felt no malice from the voice, he didn't dare to enter the formation of a stranger. As such, he could only summon his courage to refuse the offer and risk upsetting the other party.

"Hehe, it seems you're quite careful! But since this is the case, how about you tell me about your situation. Why was there a group of grade two demon beasts in pursuit of you?" The voice

spoke without the slightest care, but his later words carried a trace of curiosity.

The middle-aged man's face finally relaxed. He hastily replied with a respectful tone, "I am a disciple of the Azure Spirit Sect. We went out to sea in order to pick a few spiritual herbs. During a moment of carelessness, we caught the eye of those demon beasts and they have pursued us ever since. Were it not for Senior's rescue, us Juniors would've faced calamity."

The voice merely gunted in response before turning silent. This left the cultivators uneasy.

The middle-aged cultivator grew apprehensive. However, he didn't dare to leave yet and managed to keep his calm.

After a moment of silence, the man's voice indifferently said, "Your Azure Spirit Sect only sent out you five? Why aren't there any sect elders leading you? Don't you know you'd only be seeking death by going out to sea with your meager cultivations? Even if a sect has no Core Formation cultivators, grade two demon beasts shouldn't pose much of a threat against a group of Foundation Establishment cultivators."

After that was said, the middle-aged cultivator paused for a moment. With some hesitation, he then bitterly smiled, "Seniors? Our Azure Spirit Sect is but a small sect. Although we once had a Core Formation elder, he perished in the Beast Torrent over twenty years ago. There are only Foundation Establishment cultivators in our sect now, and their numbers aren't many."

As the middle-aged man thought about his response, he was worried whether or not this Senior would form evil intentions after hearing about their sect's details. But after some further thought, he realized that if this person wanted to kill them, he could've done so easily with his puppets. After all, his cultivation was vastly superior to their own. There would be no need for him to waste the effort with such long ploys. And if he were to conceal

any information from this senior, he would risk him, damning all of them to death. As such, the middle-aged cultivator came to a resolution and took the risk of honestly answering. He didn't believe that anybody would harbor any designs towards a ruined sect such as his own.

“Beast Torrent? How long ago did this occur? Does it have something to do with those demon beasts?” The man's voice seemed to carry a trace of alarm.

When the middle-aged man heard this, he grew shocked. The youths in his party also revealed amazement.

Chapter 531: Indifference to a Pleading Request

The middle-aged man let out a long breath, and muttered, “Senior doesn’t know about the Beast Torrent? It seems that Senior has secluded himself for many years and isn’t informed on the affairs of the outside world.”

“From your tone, the circumstances sound quite grim!” Although the man’s voice was quite cold, his words carried a trace of interest.

The middle-aged cultivator was speechless. The circumstances on the outside couldn’t just be described as ‘grim’! It seemed this old eccentric had secluded himself for who knows how many years. How else could he be ignorant of the disastrous event that took place twenty years ago?

However, this was of great relief to him. With this Senior’s cultivation, he should feel like it would be beneath his dignity to attack them for anything that they might have.

With that thought in mind, the middle-aged man wore a respectful expression, replying, “Senior! The Beast Torrent was an event that occurred about twenty years ago. At that time, Junior was only a Qi Condensation cultivator. Although I hadn’t personally witnessed it, I’ve heard many Seniors in my sect speak about it. It was said that countless demon beasts emerged from the depths without warning and rushed towards Wondrous Depths Island. They had completely surrounded Blackrock City and launched fierce attacks at it without end. Although the island was protected by several great formations and was defended by several thousand cultivators along with a party of Nascent Soul Seniors, the demon beasts broke through in only a matter of days. Apart from a small fraction of cultivators that were able to escape in the chaos, the rest were all slain.”

The middle-aged cultivator spoke with a dim expression.

“Something like that happened!? And the aftermath? Did the demon beasts return to the depths?” The man’s voice momentarily revealed a trace of shock before calming down.

“Matters would’ve taken a turn for the better had they had just returned to the depths. After turning Blackrock City into ruins, they divided into several groups, each led by a few high grade demon beasts. Then they started to wipe out other human villages and establishments. However, information of the torrent had reached a majority of them beforehand and their people managed to flee and go into hiding. Still, there were many cultivators and mortals that were eliminated by these attacks. As a result, nearly half a year passed by where not a single human settlement existed. They had all been wiped out by the demon beasts, and this wasn’t the end. Although most of the demon beasts returned to the depths, there were a few intelligent high grade demon beasts that had started to search for humans in hiding, devouring them one by one. It was said that after a short time, mortals in the outer seas had been nearly wiped out, and a majority of the cultivators had fallen as well. Fortunately, there were a few islands far from Wondrous Depths Island that the cultivators were able to settle on and hide away. Currently, Wondrous Depths Island has become an outpost for high grade demon beasts. So long as they catch wind of any cultivators, they will immediately launch an attack to eliminate us.” The middle-aged man’s expression became sorrowful.

After that, the man’s voice grew silent for a long while as if he had been heavily shaken, and needed some time to digest the information.

The voice then coldly laughed and slowly said, “Hehe! It is quite funny. We’ve swapped roles with the demon beasts. Humans are now taking the role of prey.” His words carried a trace of mockery, leaving the cultivators stunned.

As if trying to save his breath, the voice then directly asked several questions, “Wondrous Depths Island had many Nascent Soul eccentrics on guard. They can’t have all perished in the Beast Torrent. Why haven’t they appeared and taken charge of the situation? And with such huge disaster having struck Profound Depths Island, why haven’t the Inner Star Seas responded and sent over reinforcements? Or have the forces of the Inner Star Seas completely given up on Wondrous Depths Island?”

Each following question became sharper and struck closer to the heart of the matter. As for the middle-aged man, his knowledge only covered a few of the questions.

After some consideration, he carefully answered, “During the year of the Beast Torrent, I heard that while two Nascent Soul cultivators perished in the assault, most of them managed to flee. Although there has been no news of those Seniors, word has it that they are planning something great. It is quite possibly an attack to reclaim Wondrous Depths Island. However, this Junior is unaware of the concrete details. As for the Inner Star Seas, all contact with them has been lost ever since the day of the Beast Torrent. Nobody knows what is happening on the other side. With regards to reinforcements, not a single one has been seen. It is likely as Senior said, Wondrous Depths Island has already been given up by the Inner Star Seas.” After that was said, his face wore a gloomy expression. It seemed the cultivators fortunate enough to survive the Beast Torrent had grown apathetic towards the Inner Star Seas and unconsciously harbored resentment towards them.

The voice grew silent for a moment more before leisurely asking, “Since there is such danger, why is it that you Juniors dared to brave these dangerous seas instead of staying safely put? Are you seeking death?”

The middle-aged cultivator revealed a miserable expression, but before he could answer, the yellow-robed young woman’s expression fluctuated as she suddenly shot forward from behind

the old man.

“Senior, because my father cultivated an unsuitable cultivation art, his true essence suffered backlash and his meridians are in disarray, rendering him paralyzed. With Senior’s great power, he must have a method to save him! If Senior saves my father, this Junior is willing to toil ceaselessly in order to repay your kindness!” The young woman bitterly pled with eyes overflowing with tears, invoking a feeling of tender pity.

When the others heard this, they were greatly shocked and couldn’t help but look at each other in dismay. But when the middle-aged cultivator heard this, his heart trembled and he instantly rebuked her, “Xing’er, what nonsense are you speaking? Senior Martial Brother has been bedridden for years. He is no longer treatable by ordinary means. We’ve only come on this journey to find medicine to alleviate his pain. Senior’s magic power may be profound, but that alone cannot treat your father.” Although the middle-aged cultivator’s words were harsh, he wore an odd expression as he spoke.

The voice coldly laughed and lazily said, “His true essence suffered backlash and his meridians are in disarray? He seems to have vainly overreached himself. These are symptoms of attempting to forcefully cultivate a high level technique while his cultivation was lacking.”

This expert was able to diagnose the cause of the illness without having personally seen the man. This caused a flicker of joy to appear on the middle-aged man’s face.

“Senior is truly knowledgeable. It was because of my Senior Martial Brother’s impatient cultivation that led to misfortune. Would Senior happen to know a technique that could save him?” After the middle-aged man respectfully praised him, he asked about the crux of the matter. It seems he has a good relationship with this Senior Martial Brother of his.

“This illness won’t take much to cure, but why would I tell you? Did you believe that I could provide my assistance without any benefit?” The voice seemed to perceive the man’s thoughts and bluntly mocked him.

The middle-aged man paused for a moment before his complexion fluctuated between red and white. Despite his moving lips, he couldn’t bring himself to say anything.

The yellow-clothed young woman gained hope from those words and a trace of color returned to her face. With gritted teeth and a beating heart, she knelt before the light barrier.

Soon after, the adorable young woman said with determination, “Junior Gongsun Xing pledges that so long as Senior can cure my father, this woman is willing to devote her life to you as your loyal servant. If Senior is not at ease, Junior is willing to enter restrictions before Senior heads out to save her father.” With that said, the woman faced the light barrier and kowtowed her head three times against the ground. A resolute expression remained on her face.

Despite appearing so young, the yellow-robed woman was staunch.

With furious surprise, the middle-aged man rebuked, “Stupid girl, do you know what folly you are committing? Senior is a man of great status. What use does he see in a disgraceful girl like you?”

The others in the party managed to recover from their shock and each said their own words to try and dissuade her.

However, the yellow-clothed woman ignored them and continued to kneel in place. It seemed like she decided to stay kneeling until she heard his reply.

The young woman shook her pale face and calmly said, “Everyone, please stop. My talent is unclear. My mother went through much difficulty to deliver me, and my father forcefully

cultivated the sixth layer of the Azure Spirit Profound Arts in order to cleanse my essence and transform my meridians, leaving himself cripple and bedridden. Now is the time that I can fulfill my filial duties. So long as my father can be cured, I am willing to devote my life to Senior without complaint.”

“Girl, could it be that you wish to pressure me? If I don’t act, then will you stay forever kneeling?” The man’s voice coldly laughed without the slightest sympathy.

“Junior doesn’t dare. Gongsun Xing is already immensely grateful towards Senior for saving our lives! However, my father is bedridden; we’ve tried our hardest to find someone to cure him, but all attempts have failed. From Senior’s tone, Xing’er believes that this will take but a trivial effort from him. Junior’s only intention is to bitterly plead with Senior so that she may fulfill her filial duties, nothing else!” The woman’s voice was on the verge of sobbing by the time she finished. She kowtowed once more as she held back her sobs.

The light barrier remained silent.

Chapter 532: Cultivation Vessel

Woosh. A huge ape emerged from the light barrier, and walked several steps towards the kneeling young woman before halting.

The expressions of the others changed upon seeing this, watching the puppet with worry. The yellow-robed woman opened her bright, reddish eyes and vacantly stared at the huge ape.

“Regardless of the truth of what you said, you still are quite pitiful. However, I have never done anything without profit. I sense that you are still a virgin, and I have cultivated to a bottleneck. Perhaps, I could break through it with the assistance of pair cultivation. If you are willing to become my cultivation vessel, enter the spell formation and I will give your companions a bottle of three Vital Essence Pills. It should be more than enough to save your father. I will not force you, nor will I take advantage of the weak. If you are unwilling, then you may leave. Just act as if you never met me.” The man’s voice was ice-cold, containing not the slightest emotion.

At that moment, the huge ape puppet extended its arms, revealing a small bottle of sparkling white jade. It presented the bottle to the kneeling woman before it.

The young woman’s mind grew blank after hearing this. Although she was young, she still knew about the meaning of pair cultivation and cultivation vessels. Her originally pale-white face, unconsciously blushed. Still, she unhesitatingly replied, “Good. So long as my father can recover, Junior is willing to become Senior’s cultivation vessel.” With that said, the young woman reached out and took the bottle into her hands before slowly standing up.

The middle-aged man was greatly shocked by the young woman’s words and panickedly shouted, “Xian’er! How could you do this? What will I tell your father?”

The others’ expressions also greatly changed upon hearing her,

and they each attempted to dissuade her.

The young woman didn't respond to the old man's outburst. Instead, she offered the jade bottle to him and calmly asked, "Martial Uncle, can you please check the medicine pills in the bottle and see whether or not they will be of use towards my father?"

"You...!" Sigh! The middle-aged cultivator took the jade bottle and glanced at the young woman's tender, expressionless face before letting out a long sigh. Knowing that he couldn't change her mind, he could only sullenly take the jade bottle and examine the faint blue medicine pills within.

A peculiar scent slowly spread throughout the air surrounding. All those who smelled it would feel their minds and bodies become free of burden.

The middle-aged cultivator lost focus after smelling the pills' medicinal scent. After taking another whiff, he shouted out in surprise, "These are medicine pills refined from demon cores!"

The young woman remained calm and thoroughly asked, "They were refined with demon cores? Will these Vital Essence Pills heal my father?"

The middle-aged cultivator's expression grew complicated. After hesitating for a moment, he truthfully said, "Although I don't know the specific effects of this pill, it is an exceptionally rare item. It is unlikely to be fake."

"Many thanks for Martial Uncle's answer. Xian'er now feels relieved, but I'm afraid I must trouble Martial Uncle to bring it back and tell my father what happened. If only this unfilial daughter had never been born." The young woman sighed. With reddened eyes, she turned around and headed into the light barrier.

The middle-aged man's expression changed several times. He

opened his mouth but couldn't bring himself to say anything. All he could do was take the jade bottle into his hands.

At that moment, the huge ape puppet soon returned into the light barrier. The opening had begun to slowly close.

With an anxious expression, the burly youth couldn't help but loudly ask, "Martial Uncle, will you truly allow Junior Martial Sister Gongsun to become a cultivation vessel?" The expressions of the other two women had also darkened.

Wearing a gloomy expression, the middle-aged man softly said, "Didn't you see it? Your Junior Martial Sister had already come to a decision. I am no longer able to stop her. Moreover, these medicine pills can truly cure the sect master. I cannot block her in consideration of the Azure Spirit Sect's wellbeing as well."

Blood flushed the youth's face. He contended with all his might, "But you still can't allow Junior Martial Sister to become a cultivation vessel! Will this not damn Junior Martial Sister to ruin?"

The middle-aged man's cheek twitched and he wore a resigned expression. "Marital Nephew Li, you've grown up with Xing'er and are as close as true siblings. However, it is too late to change anything."

The blue-clothed woman suddenly shouted out, "Martial Uncle, Junior Martial Sister Gongsun is about to disappear."

When the middle-aged man and the burly youth heard this, they hastily turned around to see the light barrier brightly shine. The young woman then gradually faded away in a pulse of brilliance. After a short moment, the light disappeared along with any trace of the young woman. Only layers of withered leaves remained.

Like a ball of deflated air, the burly youth fell onto his knees and held his head in his hands without uttering a single word.

The middle-aged man patted the youth's shoulder and consoled

him. An hour later, the remaining four left the small island and flew out of the mist.

After the yellow-clothed woman was wrapped up by the radiance, she was dizzyingly teleported away. By the time she recovered her bearings, she found herself standing inside an unfamiliar valley with steep walls. There was a ten-meter-tall gate of grey stone in front of her.

The young woman glanced around with hesitation lingering in her heart. While she was uncertain of what she should do, an ape puppet appeared behind her with a flash of light.

The puppet ignored the young woman and walked towards the stone gate with large strides. After placing its arms on the gate, it was able to push it open with ease.

“Your name is Gongsun Xing? Follow my puppet into the cave residence. I will be leaving seclusion in two days.” The man’s voice momentarily appeared before disappearing once more.

When the yellow-clothed young woman heard him, she entered the stone gates as she bit on her lip. After following the huge ape for several turns, the young woman was brought into a stone room that was about ten meters wide.

Apart from a stone bed covered in unknown fur, a stone table, and two stone chairs, there was nothing else in the room.

After leading her here, the puppet left the room without a care, leaving the young woman in a complete daze. She was at a loss of what to do.

She examined the room and looked outside to see that the door wasn’t shut as if she was free to move around. But after some thought, she slowly sat down on top of the bed and began to blankly ponder as she held her cheeks.

Although she had already made preparations to surrender herself, she naturally held some fear towards living the rest of her

days as a rumored pair-cultivation vessel. Furthermore, she had found herself in an unfamiliar environment completely alone, causing her heart to swell with further misery.

Two hours later, she ceased her wild wandering thoughts and looked to the hallway outside the room with some hesitation.

After a short moment, she stood up and quietly walked out of the stone room. She followed the hallway for a short distance and turned several corners before finding herself inside a large hall with many arched doors. This was one of the places she had passed through when she had entered.

However, the young woman particularly took notice of an arched door that had an ape puppet posted outside. It stood motionless as if it were dead.

The young woman blinked, revealing her long eyelashes. She thought to peek through the arched door but before she approached it, the ape puppet at the side suddenly appeared in front of her and barred her way.

The young woman recoiled in fear and the ape puppet indifferently returned to its original position. Its jet-black eyes were wandering around as if wanting to stop anyone from approaching.

At that moment, Gongsun Xing clearly understood that the room in front of her wasn't somewhere she could go. Instead, she headed in the direction of another door.

This time, the ape puppet didn't stop her, much to her relief. She directly walked through the doors and entered a rather peculiar medicine garden. There was a sealed stone room on the other side of the garden.

The youth woman approached the door and curiously pushed it open with her slim hand. The door was easily opened, allowing Xing'er to clearly see what was within.

There was a stone table with piles of various colored jade slips arranged at the center of the room. To the side, there was a circular short stone block that had several pots filled with strange green plants on top of it. It made for a peaceful scene.

The young woman pursed her adorable small lips and entered the room without further thought.

She arrived in front of the stone table and casually picked up a red jade slip, immersing her spiritual sense into it.

It was a jade slip that provided an introduction towards formation spells, something the young woman was completely uninterested with. She withdrew her spiritual sense and placed the jade slip back onto the table.

She then casually picked up a white jade slip and looked through it with her spiritual sense. This time, the jade slip provided an introduction towards tool refinement. The young woman was once again disinterested and withdrew her spiritual sense.

However, as both of the jade slips held completely different information, the young woman became curious and began to scan through each of the jade slips on the table.

Chapter 533: A Gift

After looking through the slips with tool refining and spell formation information, the young woman was quickly sweeping through a jade slip that introduced medicine pill formulas and demon beasts. After she was done with it, she moved on to the next jade lip on the table. Immediately after immersing her spiritual sense into it, she was stunned.

It contained a cultivation art known as the “Golden True Arts”. Out of curiosity she read through it for a moment before her attention was completely drawn in. She read the jade slip for no less than an hour before withdrawing her spiritual sense in a daze. She wore an expression of fear on her face.

This Golden True Arts was the precious top-grade cultivation art of a sect. Why was its cultivation incantation so casually placed on a table without any restrictions guarding it?

Although the young woman knew the cultivation art’s value, she still reluctantly put it back in its original place after some hesitation. Now she was even more interested in looking through the rest of the jade slips on the table.

Half a day later, the young woman had finished browsing through all of the jade slips on the table. A vast majority of the jade slips contained teachings about either formation spells or medicine pills. Only a small number contained cultivation arts, but there wasn’t a single one present that wasn’t top grade. There was one particular cultivation art, the “Coiling Jade Arts”, that left her particularly tempted.

The Azure Spirit Sect was only a tiny sect in the Scattered Star Seas. Its main cultivation art, the Azure Spirit Arts, was merely a standard cultivation art. It couldn’t possibly compete in terms of might with the Coiling Jade Arts.

After glancing through the jade slips, her mind wandered for a

moment before recalling that there were still other places that she had yet to explore. She left the stone room and walked back to the large hall.

Of the remaining three arched doors, there were two that were guarded by puppets, leaving her with only one that she could enter. As a result, the young woman entered the only unguarded door.

After entering, she was left stunned and remained motionless for quite a while.

There was a sixty meter wide hall with a thirty meter wide spell formation placed at its center. The spell formation released a barrier of translucent, faint-red light. The light fluctuated and sparkled intermittently, revealing a magnificent sight.

The light barrier contained dozens of variously fashioned swords, spears, and other such items. There were a few that released a clear ring, and some that chased after one another, but all of them appeared to possess intelligence.

Outside of the light barrier, there were two layers of crude wooden racks lining the walls. Each of the racks held a variety of magic tools. Although they didn't have a light barrier blocking them, they each flickered with brilliant light and contained vigorous amounts of spiritual Qi.

Although the young woman hadn't seen any of them before, she was able to tell that the items contained inside the light barrier were like the magic treasures from legend with the intelligence that they displayed.

The young woman had always yearned to look at such magic treasures, but unfortunately there were just far too many before her. Eyes filled with amazement, she couldn't bring herself to believe what she was seeing.

A long while later, she finally came to her senses. After further

looking at the light barrier with a strange expression, she hesitantly walked towards the wooden racks. She casually took a pitch-black ruler and examined it, discovering that the unremarkable item was actually a high grade magic tool.

But having already experienced far too many surprises before this, she hardly revealed any shock at the discovery.

She then began to look through each of the magic tools on the racks, all of which were either high or top grade. There was nothing of inferior quality present.

Had the young woman managed to acquire one of these magic tools in the past, she would've been immensely excited. Now after glancing at the many magic treasures and hundreds of magic tools, the young woman left the room with empty hands, after recalling that she was now but a cultivation vessel.

Two days later, inside the stone room with the jade slips, the young girl was sitting down on a round stone block. She was concentrating on the contents of the jade slip in her hand.

“The Coiling Jade Arts are quite suitable for a female cultivator, though they were acquired by male cultivator, namely me.” A man's gentle voice suddenly came from the doorway.

The young woman felt her heart tremble and quickly withdrew her spiritual sense. She then flusteredly turned around.

She saw a blue-robed youth with an ordinary appearance standing by the door. He was looking at her with a smile.

Gongsun Xing hesitantly asked, “You, you're Senior?”

Although his voice was somewhat similar, this gentle-faced youth was truly too young. It was completely different from what she had imagined.

Having experienced so many astonishing things, the young woman had come to expect the Senior to be an old man with profound, mystical abilities. She even apprehensively guessed that

he was a tempermental eccentric!

“What? Am I not as expected?” The youth was Han Li who had just left seclusion. He walked into the room with a faint smile.

“Senior, these cultivation arts, I...” For some unknown reason, she inwardly felt relieved upon discovering that Han Li was the owner of that expert’s voice. However, she still stuttered trying come up with an explanation.

Han Li indifferently said, “It doesn’t matter. Since I didn’t forbid you from entering, I was allowing you to chose a cultivation art.”

“Many thanks to Senior!” The woman expressed unconcealed happiness with delightful charm.

Upon seeing the young woman’s excitement, Han Li unconsciously felt a tinge of emotion.

Han Li smiled and casually asked, “It’s been a while since I’ve been to the outside. Would Lady Gongsun happen to know anywhere in the seas that one might be able to trade?”

The young woman’s smile vanished as if she had thought of something. After quickly taking a peek at Han Li, she lowered her head and softly said, “If one wishes to trade... about half a month south, there is a barren island with a market city. The nearby cultivators conduct trade there. I heard that there were several Core Formation cultivators that joined hands to keep the peace there. Does Senior require a map?”

Han Li confidently said, “I must make a trip there. Naturally, a map would be good.”

The young woman flusteredly took out a jade slip from her storage pouch and handed it over to Han Li with a red face.

Han Li smiled and reached out to take the jade slip. At the same time, a strange expression flickered from his eyes when he saw the young woman’s flushed, tender face. He suddenly reached out to touch her soft, luscious hair.

Gongsun Xing's heart trembled with slight fear, but she didn't shrink back. She only unconsciously turned her head away.

At that moment, Han Li's soft voice entered her ear, "Don't be afraid. Come to my bedroom tonight. Don't forget."

After he said this, he left the room without further hesitation.

When Gongsun Xing heard these dubious words, she felt her heart jump and her face turned crimson, revealing an adorable appearance of complete embarrassment.

When night arrived, she arrived outside Han Li's bedroom in a complicated mood. She entered the stone room as she nibbled on her lips, but she was left surprised by what she saw.

The bedroom had no one inside. There was only a stone desk with an unfurled scrolled on it.

After a moment of hesitation, Gongsun Xing walked over puzzled and lowered her head, reading, "Your filial behavior is quite laudable. I give all the remaining treasures in the cave residence to you. Don't show them to others, or you will attract calamity upon yourself. Do your best!"

There was nothing else after that, leaving the young woman at a complete loss. She could only feel blank confusion along with an indescribable emotion.

At that moment, Han Li had already flown five hundred kilometers away from the small island in a streak of azure light.

Smiling, Han Li leisurely thought, "I'm sure that girl must be completely baffled. Anyone going through such an unpredictable experience should be left amazed for at least half a day!"

When he had left the sea mist, he had stripped the cave residence of everything apart from the jade slip containing the Coiling Jade Arts, numerous unwanted magic tools, along with a few medicine pills and two looted magic treasures that he left behind specifically for the girl. These items would surely allow the young woman to

tread to future heights that are rarely reached on the path of cultivation!

This rare showing of immense generosity wasn't due to a sudden feeling of tenderness towards the fairer sex. But rather, the young woman's resolve to sacrifice herself for her father had deeply moved Han Li.

If Han Li had any regrets before setting foot on the path of cultivation, it would be that he was unable to fulfill his filial duties to his parents after reaching adulthood. Although he had secretly made arrangements with the Seven Mysteries Sect Master for his family, it didn't offset the sense of loss he felt deep in his heart.

Additionally, the young woman's appearance had reminded Han Li of the last he had seen his little sister when she had gotten married.

As such, he had deliberately used the pretense of having the woman as a cultivation vessel in order to give her a few benefits. Of course, the magic tools and treasures that Han Li had left for her posed little to no value to him.

Since the items would remain useless on him, it would be better for him to take the opportunity to give them to the girl, providing her the assistance to tread farther on the path of Immortal cultivation. The woman's spiritual roots were also inferior, just like his own had been.

As for Han Li's cave residence, he had already decided that he would abandon the island the next time he left, long before these people had arrived.

Chapter 534: Rescue from Demon Beasts

After Han Li reached mid Core Formation stage, he had remained in seclusion for an additional twenty years. During this time, he still hadn't exhausted all of his medicine pills and carried about a smaller portion of them in his storage pouch.

His early departure from seclusion without having yet consumed all of his medicine pills was due to neither restlessness nor impatience. It was because he had encountered a bottleneck as he neared late Core Formation stage. Until he broke through the obstruction, his cultivation wouldn't progress in the slightest even if he used more medicine pills.

These breakthroughs were left completely up to destiny or fortunate encounters. There were absolutely no established methods to break through such a bottleneck. However, in the past, cultivators had managed to break through this stage through merely cultivating, touring the world, or battling in a life or death struggle. Each occurrence was entirely unexpected.

As such, Han Li was unwilling to vainly waste his time in seclusion and he prepared to set out to find the legendary Demon Echo Grass. Perhaps he would even happen to unexpectedly breakthrough the bottleneck during this journey.

Because he didn't know how long the trip would take, Han Li didn't dare to leave the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng inside the cave. This was yet another reason he had decided to completely abandon the residence inside the small misty island.

As for the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng, it periodically required earth Qi for preservation. Although this had proved to be somewhat troublesome before Han Li entered mid Core Formation stage, it no longer presented a problem. Han Li already had the ability to draw out an island's earth essence Qi and pour it into the spirit ginseng's body, ensuring its continued survival.

Han Li was currently flying in the direction of the market city that the young woman had spoken of. It was the only place where cultivators frequently passed through that Han Li could potentially find information on any grade eight demon beasts. When that time came, he would have to think of a method to acquire the Demon Echo Grass. As for any thoughts of being able to directly purchase it, he didn't believe such a fortuitous event could occur.

Han Li flew at an extremely fast speed. Although the young woman said it would take half a month to reach the market city, in Han Li's case, it would only take a few days at most at his full speed.

Two days later as Han Li was hurrying on his way, he suddenly spotted a red streak of light flying off in the distance. It was being relentlessly pursued by several balls of grey Qi.

When Han Li saw this, he unconsciously raised his eyebrows, and after some thought, he muttered an unintelligible incantation. Soon, a series of cracks sounded out from within his body with increasing frequency. Simultaneously, azure light covered his face.

A moment later, Han Li's figure suddenly grew a few inches taller. The azure light disappeared to reveal the face of an unfamiliar yellowish man.

This was one of the secret techniques from the Profound Yin Arts that Han Li had meticulously cultivated during his seclusion, the Appearance Exchange Art. Not only could this secret technique allow oneself to shrink or lengthen any body part at will, one could also control the thickness of one's flesh and change the color of one's skin in an instant. It was absolutely a top grade disguise technique.

Han Li reckoned that this cultivation art was on par with the disguise techniques of legend. Even cultivators of a higher grade would be unable to easily see through his disguise. Hence, it was included amongst the collection of Profound Yin Arts.

The only shortcoming of the secret technique was that once the technique was used, one could only use seventy percent of their magic power at most. If one exceeded this limit in a fight, the disguise would dissolve and reveal one's true appearance.

However, Han Li didn't care about this in the least. Whenever he donned his disguise, he likely didn't want to reveal his true strength anyways. As such, the limit shouldn't pose much of a problem to him.

Just after Han Li changed his appearance, the streak of red light discovered his location and wildly flew in Han Li's direction as if it were their only hope at life.

As for the grey balls of Qi chasing after the red streak, they were clearly demon beasts that ranged around grade three and four.

When Han Li saw this, he immediately stopped and let out a long sigh. He didn't sigh because trouble came knocking on his door, but because the person flying towards him didn't care in the slightest about whether or not he could deal with the demon beasts. It seemed the man being chased wished to dragged himself down along with Han Li. As he did this without any hesitation, there wasn't much else to say about the unknown man's nature.

Han Li, who had recently felt greatly touched by Gongsun Xing's display of familial piety, once again questioned the complexity of human nature.

One simply couldn't lump these things all together!

"Fellow Daoist, please save me! I, Huang Mingli, will definitely express my gratitude towards you!" A shriveled old man with a wicked appearance directly flew towards Han Li with a panicked expression.

He was quite shrewd. Although he hadn't made out Han Li's true cultivation, he knew that his life was saved after seeing Han Li's steadfast, unshakable bearing.

Han Li calmly watched the old man flying at him with an indifferent expression. He then lazily raised his hand and shot out five giant azure sword streaks, instantly tying down the five demon beasts chasing after him.

When the old man saw this, he happily let out a long breath of relief and released a fire ring magic tool to attack the five demon beasts.

Han Li cast a sideways glance at the old man. The old man's cultivation was at peak Foundation Establishment, the false core stage. It was no wonder why he had been able to flee from a joint attack by so many grade four demon beasts.

Han Li turned his gaze back to the demon beasts and commanded the several streaks of swordlight to slowly surround them in a calm display of his overwhelming strength. When the old man saw this, his spirit was greatly roused, and he controlled his fire-attribute magic tool with increasingly fierce intensity as he struck the now vulnerable demon beasts.

After another moment passed, Han Li felt it was about time to end the battle and had the azure essence swordstreaks exterminate the demon beasts.

With the demon beasts dead, the small old man already realized that Han Li was a Core Formation cultivator. As such, he respectfully saluted him and said, "Many thanks for Senior's rescue! Could it be that Senior wishes to head to Southdark City?"

Han Li calmly nodded, "That's right. I wish to head to the city to trade for a few items."

Huang Mingli's eyes shifted around for a moment and he bitterly smiled before saying, "Then Senior need not continue, the trip would be in vain."

Han Li's expression stirred and he asked with surprise, "What happened?"

As he faced a Core Formation cultivator, the small old man carefully explained, “Several days ago at Southdark City, there were a few low grade demon beasts that unexpectedly arrived. Although a majority were killed, the next day, a swarm of grade four and five demon beasts were brought over to the city by the survivors from the previous day. A great number of the city’s cultivators had been harmed, forcing us to break through the demon beast’s siege. I was among those who escaped. However, I didn’t expect to come across another group of demon beasts on my way out.”

“According to what you’ve said, this trip was for nothing?” Han Li frowned and wore a sullen expression.

Huang Mingli’s eyes faintly flickered before revealing a grin with crooked teeth. He then secretly said, “Well... If Senior truly wishes to trade, this little old man knows of another place. The items there are all precious. One must be at Foundation Establishment or higher to enter the city along with having a referral. Additionally, the market city frequently changes location. This old man currently has the qualifications to give you a referral to the city. If Senior wishes to go, Junior will lead the way as payment for saving his life. ”

Han Li paused for a moment before pensively saying, “Are you talking about a secret city?”

The old man wore an embarrassed expression and quickly explained, “Senior must think me silly. The market city can’t be considered to be secret. They merely fear conflict. Once the demon beasts discover it, it will be the city’s end.”

“So it’s like that!” Han Li couldn’t help but smile after hearing this. He then asked, “How far away is this place?”

Huang Mingli seemed quite familiar with this market city and instantly replied, “If we hurry, we should be able to reach it in half a month’s time. By then the market city should have just opened.”

After some consideration, Han Li replied, "Alright. I'll go along with you."

"Great!" Huang Mingli revealed an excited expression and paused as if he had suddenly thought of something. "Huh? Senior, please wait a moment!"

He hurriedly said a word of apology before shooting straight down to the sea where the corpses of the demon beasts were floating.

When Han Li saw this, he knowingly smiled.

A short moment later, the small old man dismembered the demon beasts with great familiarity and placed their parts into his storage pouch. He then flew back into the sky with high spirits.

"I've made an embarrassment of myself. While these demon beasts certainly wouldn't have caught Senior's eyes, they are quite valuable to this Junior!" The old man spoke with slight embarrassment. After all, those five demon beasts had all been slain by Han Li.

"It's nothing. Those demon beasts had no value to me anyways. Let's hurry!" Han Li shook his head and urged him with an unchanged expression.

Chapter 535: Trade Gathering

When Huang Mingli heard Han Li's desire to depart, he agreed with an embarrassed smile. He then flew off to the east on his magic tool while Han Li leisurely followed after him with a calm expression.

As Huang Mingli flew, he turned his head to steal a glance at Han Li's face, and carefully asked, "Senior's face is quite unfamiliar. Have you been in secluded cultivation for a long time? Junior might've heard of your name before!"

Han Li casually said, "My surname is Li. I've remained in my cave residence for secluded cultivation until recently, when I finally formed my core. It isn't surprising that Fellow Daoist Huang hadn't heard of me before." Of course, Han Li didn't give his real name.

The small old man didn't notice anything amiss from Han Li, and could only speak words of congratulations despite still holding a few doubts in his heart.

Huang Mingli was quite tactful and didn't further inquire about Han Li. Instead, he took the initiative to tell Han Li about a few of the recent confrontations between cultivators and demon beasts. However, from his deep sighs, it seemed the old man didn't hold much hope towards humanity's future in the Outer Star Seas.

Although the endless conversation was almost entirely one-sided, Han Li had gained a much greater understanding towards the current circumstances of the Outer Star Seas.

Nothing strange occurred in the following half month, allowing Han Li and the small old man to eventually spot a small, peaceful island in the distance. This island was only about fifty kilometers in area and possessed sparse amounts of spiritual Qi. Apart from a small growth of vegetation, the island only consisted of bare grey rock and appeared like any other desolate island.

It was an optimal location for a secret city. But even in that case, about half a day out, Han Li and the old man concealed their flight and approached the island under the guise of concealment techniques.

This, of course, was a requirement for entering the secret city.

When Huang Mingli beseeched him to conceal himself, Han Li silently complied without any complaint. This was a great relief to Huang Mingli as Core Formation cultivators weren't always particularly easy to deal with in his experience.

Huang Mingli flew a circle around the small island before landing on a heap of rocks.

When Han Li saw this, a strange expression flickered from his eyes. If he wasn't mistaken, there shouldn't be any restrictions there. Could it be...?

As Han Li continued to mull this over, Huang Mingli stepped towards a large rock beside him and knocked three times on the stone with practiced familiarity. A short moment later, the huge rock suddenly split open to reveal a three meter wide hole.

Huang Mingli immediately stepped into the hole and softly said a few words into it. He then turned to Han Li and shouted, "Senior Li, it's right here. Let's go in!"

Han Li indifferently looked down and descended from the sky.

The hole led to a set of slanted stone stairs. To the side of the stairs stood a grey-robed, white-haired old man with a late Foundation Establishment cultivation.

Upon seeing Han Li enter, the old man smiled at him and spoke in a manner that was neither arrogant nor humble, "Senior, welcome to our market city. I hope Senior will be able to find what he needs."

"I hope so as well." Han Li calmly replied as he climbed down the stairs.

Han Li realized that in order to prevent any demon beasts from detecting spiritual Qi, formation spells couldn't be established. As such, the only option left to maintain secrecy was building everything underground.

After walking down the stairs for a short time, Han Li's eyes brightened.

There was an expansive underground world before him. The ceiling was twenty meters high with occasional pillars of transformed grey stone supporting it. There were many small square buildings at the center of the cavern, each sporting their own sign. There were over a hundred cultivators trading amongst these stone buildings.

At Han Li's side, Huang Mingli pointed to a set of descending stairs beside a stone pillar and said, "Senior Li, this floor is only for trading ordinary items. If Senior wishes to acquire rare materials, it would be best to go down to the next floor."

Han Li glanced at the stone stairs, but didn't move. He asked with a deep voice, "If I wanted information on the whereabouts of a high grade demon beast nest, where could I find it?"

Huang Mingli was obviously startled upon hearing this. A trace of confusion flickered from his eyes before he answered with great familiarity, "It would depend on what grade of demon beast Senior requires information about. If it's grade five or six demon beasts, Senior can head over to the Wind Whisper Pavilion. They specialize in selling the whereabouts of difficult to acquire treasures and high grade demon beasts, allowing one to acquire them based on their own skill. However, they won't have any information on demon beasts of a higher grade. In that case, your only option would be to ask other Core Formation Seniors. After all, the whereabouts of demon beasts of that grade aren't easily divulged. Senior could participate in the trade gathering specifically for Core formation cultivators. Perhaps that is where Senior can find what he is looking for."

“Trade gathering?” Han Li’s expression revealed a trace of excitement.

Huang Mingli carefully explained, “That’s right! Normally, only other Core Formation cultivators have the materials and treasures that a Core Formation cultivator would need. As a result, every time the market city opens, the city lord will hold a meeting where Seniors gather together for a private, small-scale exchange, where they can trade for what they wish. The city lord would also take out several rare items for the meeting as well.”

With a faint smile, Han Li slowly asked, “When does this trade gathering take place?”

The small old man promptly replied, “Senior Li will likely have to wait a few more days. I reckon around halfway through the opening of the market city, Senior will receive an invitation to join.”

When Han Li heard this, he narrowed his eyes and wore a pensive expression as if he were thinking about it.

A short moment later, he glanced at Huang Mingli and spoke without restraint, “Fellow Daoist Huang, I plan on going the rest of the way alone so we’ll be parting ways here. I no longer require your assistance.” Han Li didn’t wish to have someone following him around while he was searching for the Thousand Leaves Dew.

The small old man wasn’t particularly surprised by Han Li’s words. With a beaming smile, he said, “Senior’s words suits Junior’s intentions as well. Junior happens to want to go buy a few materials. Then I will bid you goodbye. If Senior requires any further assistance, then please do not hesitate to find me.” Huang Mingli respectfully saluted Han Li and bid his farewells. He then headed into a nearby materials store. It seemed he wished to first sell off those demon breasts corpses from before.

Han Li was quite satisfied with how tactful and quick-witted the old man had behaved.

He swept his gaze past the nearby stores and walked into the store across from him with his arms behind his back. The first store he entered had piles of all sorts of medicinal ingredients.

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Inside a quiet room, Han Li was resting with eyes closed. He felt somewhat gloomy.

During his first day in the market city, he had browsed both floors of the market city and found plenty of Demon Echo Grass but none that had grown near a grade eight demon beast. In addition, the Wind Whistle Pavilion didn't have any information on demon beasts of grade seven or higher. He could only wait for when the trade gathering convened and see if any other Core Formation cultivators had relevant information.

In the following two days, he had no intention of heading out and rented a quiet room specifically to cultivate and see whether or not he could break through his current bottleneck.

In the end, he had achieved nothing.

Thumps came from the door of his room. Although Han Li had anticipated this he still indifferently asked, "What is it?"

A woman's pleasant voice respectfully said, "Senior Li! Junior is under orders to invite you to the trade gathering. Would Senior be interested in participating?"

Han Li slowly replied, "Yes, of course I am!" He then opened the stone door and walked out of the room.

There was a white clothed woman standing outside with a lowered head, respectfully waiting for him. When she saw Han Li appear, she immediately raised her head and revealed a charming face.

When Han Li saw the woman's beautiful face, he felt his heart tremble. After staring at the woman's face, a flicker of astonishment appeared within his eyes.

‘How could it be her? What is she doing here?’ Han Li thought, astonished.

The woman saw Han Li staring at her, causing her to blush. She then lowered her head and uncomfortably asked, “Senior, is something wrong?”

Han Li quickly regained his bearings and calmly said, “It’s nothing. Lead the way.”

The white clothed woman faintly felt that something was amiss, but she respectfully agreed and walked away with calm steps.

Gazing at the woman’s silhouette, Han Li unconsciously frowned and wore a face full of confusion.

Passing through the plaza of the second floor, the woman brought Han Li to a remote stone wall.

The woman gently pressed her hand against the wall, creating ripples of white light and revealing a stone door covered in talisman characters.

Chapter 536: A Display of Women

“Senior Li, please enter!” The woman pushed the stone door open and respectfully invited Han Li inside.

Han Li nodded and walked in without another word as the woman closely followed after him. The stone door then closed by itself and disappeared, returning the wall to its previous unremarkable appearance.

After entering, Han Li saw a grey stone passageway that didn’t appear very long based on the white light he saw faintly shining at the end.

Han Li silently walked forward and made a turn at the end of the passage, suddenly facing a wide open stone door. There was a gloomy middle-aged, mid Core Formation cultivator standing outside the doorway.

When he saw Han Li appear, he immediately smiled and said, “So you’re Fellow Daoist Li? I am Yun Tianxiao, the master of the city. Welcome to my trade meeting. Nearly all of the fellow Daoists have already arrived.” The Confucian scholar surnamed Yun was very courteous to Han Li. He then indifferently turned to the woman and said, “Young Lady Wen, properly attend to Brother Li. Make sure not to neglect him!”

‘Fellow Daoist Wen?’

There was no longer any doubt regarding the woman’s identity. She was Wen Qiang’s daughter, the Exquisite Sound Sect’s [Wen Siyue](#). Just what had happened for her to appear at this place?

It had caused Han Li no small amount of amazement. Naturally, since he had used the Appearance Exchange Arts, the woman was unable to recognize him.

When Wen Siyue heard him, her flowery expression changed and she hastily acknowledged him.

Although Han Li didn't turn around, he could faintly perceive that Wen Siyue was very fearful of Yun Tianxiao.

A strange expression flickered within Han Li's eyes, but he merely smiled and casually said a few words of formality before entering.

The door led to a large square hall with a huge round table at its center. The table had over a dozen remarkably wide armchairs surrounding it. Most of the chairs were already occupied by other cultivators.

But when Han Li clearly saw the circumstances in the room, he wore a baffled expression.

Apart from two female Core Formation cultivators that were sitting alone, the male Core Formation cultivators were each nestled together with a gorgeous and alluring female cultivator. These female cultivators were either at peak Qi Condensation or early Foundation Establishment, and each of them were all young exceptional beauties.

While Han Li looked at this in a daze, he suddenly smelled a sweet fragrance, and a soft, trembling body stood close by his side. Han Li's body tensed up and he slowly turned around to see a stiff, beautiful face. Wen Siyue had taken the initiative to draw closer to him, allowing him to catch a whiff of her intoxicating scent.

Han Li frowned, but he didn't push away the woman in an act of false sophistry. Instead, he again glanced at the female cultivators at the male Core Formation cultivator's sides with a gaze of understanding.

After some thought, he wrapped his arm around the woman's waist and headed towards an empty armchair before sitting down.

Wen Siyue did the same as the other female cultivators, and reluctantly sat alongside him while leaning into Han Li's chest.

For the moment, Han Li's chest had the warm company of a

beautiful woman.

Just as Wen Siyue silently pressed her stiffened body against Han Li, Han Li relaxed the arm he had wrapped around her waist. Wen Siyue was stunned for a moment. She then unconsciously glanced at Han with a trace of bewilderment.

At that moment, Han Li was calmly examining the others in the room.

The eight other Core Formation cultivators had naturally gazed in Han Li's direction as well.

Although they found Han Li's appearance strange, they didn't reveal it on their faces. Instead, most of the people looked at Han Li with a kind smile. Han Li's expression relaxed and he returned the gesture.

A short moment later, six more Core Formation cultivators entered the hall, each with a young, beautiful female cultivator at their side.

Han Li watched this with an ordinary expression, but his heart felt amazement.

Yun Tianxiao must've possessed significant skill to have found so many young and beautiful female cultivators. All of their cultivations weren't shallow either but they were still at varying levels.

Just as Han Li pondered this, Yun Tianxiao finally entered the hall with a graceful and elegant beauty wrapped around his arm. The woman was at late Foundation Establishment Stage.

'Lady Fan!' Han Li heart was shaken upon seeing her.

'She is the Exquisite Sound Sect's Envoy of the Right, Lady Fan. It seems she has a somewhat deep relationship with the city master. This trade gathering should prove to be quite interesting.' Despite his excitement and the expectations in his heart, Han Li was able to maintain his calm expression.

“Ah!” Wen Siyue faintly trembled next to Han Li. A faint, painful groan left her dainty mouth. It sounded as if it contained flustered embarrassment.

Han Li was stunned for a moment and couldn't help but puzzlingly glance at her. He found her face to be flushed red and bashful.

He also discovered that his arm had unknowingly grasped onto her chest. He even felt his fingers pinching onto something stiff and round.

This soft, overwhelming sensation shook the depths of Han Li's soul. He immediately withdrew his hand out of instinct.

Wen Siyue's smooth, delicate neck was now flushed red. She hesitantly raised her head and gazed at Han Li's face with a trace of astonishment.

A trace of discomfort faintly appeared on Han Li's face, but he pretended not to notice, relaxing the arm he had around her.

Although he had never thought of himself as a man of honor, this woman could be considered an acquaintance, causing Han Li to be somewhat embarrassed.

Han Li discovered that this strange display wasn't noticed by anybody else in the room. Their attention had been captured by Yun Tianxiao who had already sat in the main chair with Lady Fan gracefully poised at his side.

Yun Tianxiao widely smile and said, “I am truly honored to have you thirteen Fellow Daoists participate in this trade meeting. Although there were two Fellow Daoists that had to leave early, this trade meeting is already the largest one yet. That is about all I have to say. Everyone can now take out their items. Give your items a brief introduction, and then, everyone can start bidding or offer an exchange. Accept whatever offer pleases you.”

He then turned his head to the fat, blue-robed old man and

smiled. He was clearly indicating for him to start.

As of current, the fat old man was closely embracing the body of a dainty female cultivator. Upon seeing Yun Tianxiao's smile, he reluctantly relaxed his grip on her waist and leisurely said, "Since this is the case, I will start. I've brought quite a few good items this time around. I am more than willing to exchange them for any of the materials that I require." After that was said, the old man stood up and placed a storage pouch from his waist onto the table.

Numerous items suddenly appeared on the table in a vortex of spinning red light. The spiritual Qi that the items emitted appeared significant.

"Three Heavenly Spirit Beads, an Ambusher Shark demon core, the hide of an Oceanform Beast..." The old man gave a proud introduction for each of his items, impressing no small number of the cultivators at the table. It was clear that each of these items were quite rare.

Han Li couldn't help but coldly smile at the items. While these items could be considered truly valuable to ordinary Core formation cultivators, they were completely unremarkable to him. The rarest item amongst them, the Ambusher Sharp demon core, was only a grade six demon core. Han Li had personally exterminated at least eight demon beasts of that specific type.

When the fat old man finished giving an introduction to his items, he sat back down and once again embraced the dainty woman at his side. He had a face full of arrogance.

The Qi Condensation woman was originally somewhat unwilling to be held by him, but now, her eyes unconsciously glowed with a soft light.

After the old man sat down, the person who sat next to him, an eccentric with a red embroidered headband, dryly coughed and unsteadily stood. This person was rather shriveled and appeared as if a stiff breeze would blow him over.

“I’ve only brought one item. The beast egg of the grade five Darkcoil Worm.” He spoke unhurriedly and took out a yellow beast egg from his robes shortly after he finished speaking. It was the size of a chicken egg.

“Darkcoil Worm!”

Once the eccentric had finished speaking, the eyes of the other cultivators brightened, and they rigidly stared at the demon beast egg with fervent gazes.

Wen Qiang was a Qi Condensation cultivator that met Han Li at Stalwart Star Island. Han Li met him once again many years later along with his daughter in chapter 430.

Chapter 537: Information

Each of the other cultivators took out their items, and as expected, they were each noteworthy and proved valuable to Core Formation cultivators. It was no wonder that this secret market had such a special meeting.

Han Li indifferently glanced at the items being presented. Although the items didn't interest him, they greatly provoked the interest of the other cultivators, heating up the atmosphere in the room. When Han Li's turn came, he casually took out a few rare grade six and seven demon beast materials. Of course, this naturally aroused quite some surprise.

Soon, it became the last cultivator's turn, a dark-skinned, middle-aged man. He was among the three mid Core Formation cultivators at the table. The others gazed at him with a trace of additional respect.

At that moment, the person unhurriedly took out two items from his storage pouch and casually placed them onto the table with an unchanged expression. There was a palm-sized, pitch-black copper plate, and a half-foot-long piece of grey bone. It appeared to have come from the spine of some animal.

The majority of cultivators present blankly stared at the items, unable to make out anything exceptional about them. They all waited for him to give an explanation.

But after he took out the items, he astonishingly said, "I will only sell these two items to those that recognize them. If you aren't destined for them, do not seek them!" He then leaned back against his chair without a care and narrowed his eyes, paying no heed to the beautiful woman close to him, leaving her slightly embarrassed. When the others heard this, they silently looked at each other in dismay.

Only Han Li and Yun Tianxiao revealed a slight change in

expression when they gazed at the items.

An odd expression flickered across Han Li's face. Although he was somewhat far from the items, when he swept his immense spiritual sense past them, he was able to clearly tell what they were.

Although the bone didn't belong to an ordinary demon beast, it simply didn't catch his interest. However, he was somewhat interested in the copper plate, as there were a few bewildering, ancient characters inscribed onto it. The ancient characters were nearly the same as those contained inside the aged hide book of the nameless Qi concealment technique. Could it have something to do with it? Even now, Han Li was incapable of completely understanding the ancient book's contents.

Just as Han Li inwardly mulled this over, Yun Tianxiao smiled and laughed.

After sweeping his gaze over the bones, Yun Tianxiao jokingly said, "Haha! I didn't expect Brother Sun to be so magnanimous as to bring out the spirit bone of a grade eight demon beast. I am truly tempted."

These words startled everyone present and caused an uproar. The item could be considered the most precious one being displayed. The spirit bone of an existence on the level of a grade eight demon beast was definitely a bizarre treasure seldom seen by Core Formation cultivators.

When Han Li heard this, his heart stirred. Could this person have any information on grade eight demon beasts?

The cultivator surnamed Sun chuckled upon hearing that Yun Tianxiao was able to make out the origins of the bone. After deeply glancing at him, he spoke no further.

At that point, the trade meeting became a rather fervent event. Everyone wore an expression of unconcealed excitement. The

female cultivator companions also gazed at the items on the table with passionate expressions.

When Han Li saw this, he unconsciously turned his head to Wen Siyue to find that she also wore a passionate expression. It seemed that these items held an undeniable allure regardless of one's status.

At that moment, the fat old man started to list out the conditions by which he would trade his items.

“The Heavenly Spirit Beads can be exchanged for several stalks of medicine herbs aged five hundred years and higher. The demon core requires the tendon of a grade seven demon beast. Of course, I am also willing to trade them for enough spirit stones. And...” Seeing that everyone managed to bring out precious treasures, the arrogance of the fat old man had mostly dissolved. When he spoke of the tendon, he unconsciously glanced in Han Li's direction as Han Li happened to have one on his side of the table.

Unfortunately, Han Li had no interest in a grade six demon beast core. He merely continued to sit with Wen Siyue in his loose embrace.

“I do want that grade six demon core, but I don't have any spirit tendons. How many spirit stones do you want for it?” A white haired old man said with much interested.

“As Fellow Daoist knows, demon beasts are far more difficult to come by than they had been in the past. As such, its price will be higher. I will require fifteen thousand spirit stones for it.” The fat old man appeared unwilling to part with it and responded with an obviously high price.

When the white-haired old man heard this, he bitterly smiled and said little else. It was clear the high price had dissuaded him.

“I want that demon core!” A white-haired old woman expressionlessly said. Soon after she spoke, a storage pouch flew in

the direction of the fat old man.

The fat old man received the storage pouch and wore a satisfied expression after inspecting it.

“Only Lady Qing can be so bold. Us poor cultivators cannot hope to compare.” The old man seemed to recognize the woman and tossed the demon beast core over to her with a chuckle.

The white-haired old woman coldly snorted and caught the demon beast core. After wordlessly examining it, she placed it into her storage pouch and said nothing further.

The other cultivators began to ask about the fat old man’s other items, resulting in most of them being traded for. He then put away the remaining items.

The following bidding for the red banded eccentric’s Darkcoil Worm egg created a huge contest.

Because his conditions were quite lax and he also accepted spirit stones, the demon beast egg was open to everyone. In the end, the beast egg was exchanged for several bottles of precious medicine pills by a red-clothed cultivator with an unremarkable appearance.

After another six people, it was finally Han Li’s turn.

Han Li looked at the pile of valuable materials in front of him and felt several burning gazes fall onto him. Among them was the fat old man who particularly desired the spirit tendon.

Han Li gently smiled. Without standing, he leaned back into his chair with Wen Siyue in his arm and calmly said, “I don’t want any items for these materials. I am only willing to exchange them for information. So long as your information is to my satisfaction, I will give all of these materials to you.”

“Information!?”

Han Li’s words were cause for surprise. Although they were somewhat shocked, nobody stirred up a fuss. Rather, they all

glanced at Han Li with curiosity, calmly waiting to hear what he would say next.

Yun Tianxiao's eyes stirred and suspicion flickered across his face.

Han Li leisurely asked, "Might any of you Fellow Daoists know the location of a grade eight demon beast nest? I wish to use these materials to acquire such information."

"Grade eight demon beast!" Each person took in a breath of alarm with an expression of great shock.

"Could it be that Fellow Daoist is joking? Do you intend on fighting a grade eight demon beast?" The fat old man wore an incredulous expression.

As Han Li tapped the table, he unhurriedly said, "Of course not. I am using the information for something else. But I'm not interested in saying what specifically." At the same time, he swept his gaze past the other cultivators without a trace of politeness. They revealed amazement and shock, much to Han Li's disappointment. Han Li's gaze then fell onto the dark-skinned cultivator surnamed Sun.

When Cultivator Sun saw Han Li look at him, he was startled, but soon came to an understanding. He smiled and asked, "Could it be that Fellow Daoist believes that I have information on a grade eight demon beast? Unfortunately, Fellow Daoist Li is mistaken." He then shook his head.

Han Li revealed unconcealed disappointment and deeply sighed.

But at that a moment, Han Li heard a sweet voice say, "I know the location of a grade eight demon beast, but I don't want the materials. I have a different condition for Fellow Daoist Li."

Han Li was greatly startled by who had spoken.

Han Li incredulously said, "You have information on a grade eight demon beast?"

The person who had spoken was the woman in his embrace, Wen Siyue.

Faintly leaning onto Han Li, Wen Siyue appeared extremely calm as she looked into Han Li's face and said, "That's right. I know the approximate location of a grade eight demon beast nest."

Lady Fan wore a look of amazement, but she soon rebuked Wen Siyue with a cold expression, "Siyue, what nonsense are you spouting? How could you have information on a grade eight demon beast? Don't speak without thinking!"

While Han Li was in doubt, he suddenly felt the woman draw closer to him. She firmly said, "Marital Aunt Fan! Siyue truly knows the whereabouts of a grade eight demon beast. I have no intention of deceiving Senior Li. Please, be at ease!"

Chapter 538: The Might of New Swords

“You...”

Lady Fan frowned and thought to say something when Han Li interrupted her with a serious expression, “Wait, I want to hear what she has to say. I will determine whether or not she is telling the truth.”

Yun Tianxiao’s eyes coldly glinted. After muttering to himself for a moment, he smiled, saying, “Since Martial Niece Wen knows something, let Fellow Daoist Li ask.”

With a moment’s pause, Lady Fan reluctantly agreed, “Fine!”

“Many thanks.” Without any further niceties, Han Li nodded his head and expressed his thanks.

Han Li’s casual mannerisms caused a faint trace of irritation to appear on Yun Tianxiao’s face, but it was quickly concealed.

At that moment, Han Li stared at Wen Siyue and asked, “You said you know about the nest of a grade eight demon beast.”

Han Li’s voice was tranquil, absent of either anger or happiness. This aroused a trace of hesitation in Wen Siyue who was only a hair’s breadth away. But she soon thought of something terrifying and became resolute. She nodded and gave a sincere recollection, “When I first arrived at the Outer Star Seas, I unintentionally acquired a sea map detailing a certain area. I originally believed it to be the location of hidden treasures and stealthily slipped away to take a look. I ended up discovering a young Windbreaker Beast. Fortunately, the beast was only at grade three and was unable to discover me so I immediately left the location out of fear. Senior should know that Windbreaker Beasts only give birth once they reach grade eight, and they won’t leave their offspring until they reach about grade five. As such, it is certain that there is a grade eight demon beast lurking nearby. If Senior is willing to agree to

my conditions, I am willing to lead the way.”

Han Li’s expression changed and he revealed a trace of excitement. A fully grown Windbreaker Beast was a genuine grade eight demon beast. If this woman spoke the truth, the nest was certain to have the Demon Echo Grass he required.

Han Li stared at the woman for a long while before letting out a long breath. With a deep voice, he asked, “What does Fellow Daoist desire for the information on the demon beast nest?”

Wen Siyue blushed for a moment before unhesitantly saying, “I wish for Senior to take this young woman away from here and take her as your concubine.”

“What!” Han Li paused for a moment with an expression of surprise on his face.

“Siyue, what nonsense are you saying?” When Lady Fan heard her, she was unable to stay sitting as furious surprise appeared on her face.

The other cultivators also appeared shocked. But soon after, a majority of the cultivators revealed entertained expressions. A few of them even bantered and couldn’t help but chuckle.

When Yun Tianxiao heard this, his expression grew sullen, and his complexion became ashen.

Yun Tianxiao slapped his palms against the table and stared at his hands. With a cold voice, he expressionlessly said, “I didn’t clearly hear what you wanted from Fellow Daoist Li. Let me hear that again.”

Wen Siyue’s body trembled several times while in Han Li’s embrace, and her face became bloodlessly pale. But when her bright eyes fell onto Han Li’s calm expression, she regained a trace of courage, and she shouted with all the strength in her body, “I... I want Senior Li to take me as his concubine and take me away from the Exquisite Sound Sect!” Afterwards, she lowered her head, no

longer daring to look up.

Puff. Yun Tianxiao's hands were instantly covered in grey flames that were half a foot high. The flames were wild and untamed. Strange grey light shone onto his face, making for a frightening sight.

"Hollow Bone Yin Flames!" Someone uttered. Suddenly, the original laughter and smiles in the room had disappeared, all replaced with solemn expressions.

"Fellow Daoist Li! It seems that girl's cultivation has gone awry, and her mind became addled. I hope Fellow Daoist doesn't take her drivel to heart. Servants, restrict Wen Siyue's magic power and place her in seclusion for half a month." Yun Tianxiao coldly ordered without the slightest emotion.

Just as those orders were spoken, two azure-robed, late Foundation Establishment cultivators walked in and headed straight towards Han Li.

With an ashen complexion, Wen Siyue looked into Han Li's eyes with a pleading expression and a delicate, heart-wrenching gaze.

Han Li couldn't help but frown, "Wait!"

Without waiting for Yun Tianxiao to speak, Lady Fan perturbedly said, "What? Does Fellow Daoist Li plan on taking in the woman?"

Without faltering, Han Li indifferently said, "Perhaps. However, I rather want to know the information on the demon beast. I hope Brother Yun and Madam won't be impatient. How about you wait until after hearing my response?"

When Yun Tianxiao heard this, his expression fluctuated as he muttered to himself for a short moment. He then waved his hands and extinguished the flames.

As Yun Tianxiao emotionlessly stared at Han Li, he uttered, "Servants, step down. I will listen to what he has to say."

He decided to give Han Li face as he was a fellow Core Formation cultivator. After all, there would soon be a great event where he would require the power of all the Core Formation cultivators present. Thus, he was unwilling to casually offend anybody.

“Fellow Daoist Wen took the initiative to willingly become my concubine, but I don’t care about that in the slightest. However, I am quite determined to win over her information on the demon beast. Wouldn’t it be better if I were to exchange these materials for this woman’s freedom? What do you think Brother Yun?” Han Li pushed out the pile of precious materials towards Yun Tianxiao and unblinkingly gazed at him with a mysterious smile.

“You will use these to exchange for her?” Yun Tianxiao spoke with an ice-cold tone, but his eyes revealed a trace of confusion. The pile before him contained precious materials from grade six and seven demon beasts. It was worth several tens of thousands of spirit stones at the very least, and he was more than willing to accept it in exchange for a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Even if the woman was an enchanting beauty, it was quite an astonishing affair. Could it be that the information of a grade eight demon beast was that important to him? Should he use this opportunity to settle the situation, or should he use force to further pressure him?

After some further thought, Yun Tianxiao quickly came to a conclusion and his expression relaxed. Just as he thought to say something, Lady Fan leaned her seductive body against him and whispered something into his ear. In an instant, Yun Tianxiao’s expression changed to reveal hesitation.

After a moment of silence, he righteously said, “Fellow Daoist Li, I cannot let you take this girl away, no matter how much you pay. Otherwise, it would set a precedent that will allow the sect’s female cultivators to be easily taken away by anyone who fancies them. This would greatly tarnish our reputation.”

These words startled the other cultivators and caused them to

look at each other. It was reasonable to say that the pile of precious materials was worth far more than a Foundation Establishment woman, no matter how beautiful she may be. Hence, there was definitely something amiss with Yun Tianxiao's rejection. With Han Li's unwillingness to release the woman, the others watched the scene with a sneer. They felt the following exchange would prove to be quite entertaining.

"Exquisite Sound Sect?" Han Li pursed his lips and a strange expression flickered through his eyes.

"What? Fellow Daoist Li doesn't know that this secret room was opened by the sect? I happen to be an elder of the Exquisite Sound Sect. I am assisting Sect Elder Fan in managing it," Yun Tianxiao coldly said. His face was faintly covered in a layer of strange grey Qi, undoubtedly in a display of superior might.

Yun Tianxiao's display was but a minor effort at intimidation.

'Since he is only an early Core Formation cultivator and he is currently in my territory, he will have to submit after thinking about what there is to gain and lose. It is only a pity about those materials.' Yun Tianxiao thought with slight regret. There wasn't a trace of worry in his mind.

But at that moment, Han Li suddenly sneered and uttered, "Fine."

Much like Yun Tianxiao, Han Li raised his hand, summoning a white light that abruptly flashed before him.

Yun Tianxiao was greatly startled and unconsciously circulated his cultivation art, enveloping his body in countless grey flames.

At that moment, the white light ruthlessly struck the flames. It underwent a series of blurs and suddenly revealed twelve inch-long swords that all bore into the flames.

"AH!" Yun Tianxiao was stricken with terror and hastily unleashed his magic treasure.

However, the flames weren't able to block the twelve flying swords for even an instant. The flames faded away as a dozen bloody holes appeared on Yun Tianxiao's body.

By the time Yun Tianxiao had released his small grey pitchfork, he had already fallen to the ground with a miserable scream.

When the other cultivators saw this, they became dumbstruck and their mouths were gaping open. They were unable to recollect themselves for quite some time.

Chapter 539: Provoking Awe

Han Li indifferently waved his hand and the twelve small swords converged back into one. It then disappeared into his sleeve with a flash of white light.

Han Li lowered his hand and wore a tranquil expression, saying, “Now, let’s have a chat!”

Having been struck down just a moment ago without the slightest resistance or contest, Yun Tianxiao had lost the will to fight.

After a short moment, Yun Tianxiao managed to stand up with his blood-covered body. He glanced at Han Li with a gaze full of fright.

With a pale face, Yun Tianxiao said, “Well, since I cannot stop you, feel free to take Wen Siyue away. However, let’s get the unpleasant matters out of the way first. She already caught the eye of a Senior and was being prepared as a cultivation vessel. After you take her away, don’t be afraid of any calamities you attract.” Soon after, he took out several talismans and slapped them onto his body. With a flashes of green light, his wounds healed at a visible rate.

‘Cultivation vessel?’ Han Li suddenly realized why Wen Siyue desired to depart.

However, Han Li’s expression suddenly grew cold from the implicit meaning of Yun Tianxiao’s words.

Han Li said with an unchanged expression, “There is someone else that fancies her? That’s no problem. I’ll take her anyways. Though, it would be better if Fellow Daoist kept his threats to a minimum. Otherwise, blood will be shed if my mood takes a turn for the worse.” He then casually swept his gaze across the room.

Han Li’s threats weren’t entirely plausible. If it weren’t for the

fact that so many Core Formation cultivators were present, Han Li would've clearly killed the lot of them to tie up all the loose ends. However, he wasn't completely confident in being able to kill them all. As such, he could only use his heavy words to intimidate those that were present.

If his previous attack had left the others bewildered, then his current tone had aroused suspicion that Han Li was a Nascent Soul cultivator. The cultivators present became anxious and they quickly lowered their heads. None dared to meet Han Li's gaze.

Yun Tianxiao naturally also thought of this possibility. He appeared to be an early Core Formation cultivator, but had nearly taken his life with a single strike. Additionally, he wanted to find the nest of a grade eight demon beast. When he made the connection, he suddenly began to inwardly curse without end.

Wen Siyue, still in Han Li's embrace, suddenly widened her beautiful eyes and her body jolted straight.

She would rather die than become someone else's cultivation vessel. As a result, she had decided to risk her life in that previous display. However, she completely hadn't expected this cultivator surnamed Li to possess such a frightening cultivation. He was able to suppress all the cultivators present by himself and in a single terrifying move, he gravely injured Yun Tianxiao and left Lady Fan with a faceful of terror. This was all such a delightful surprise, it felt like something that would come out of a dream.

Han Li glanced at the others' careful and meek mannerisms and coldly smiled.

He then raised his hand and summoned the dark skinned cultivator's copper plate to his hand. Han Li began to examine it without a trace of politeness.

The dark-skinned cultivator's expression faintly changed. However, his mouth trembled several times, only to remain silent. He didn't dare to say any words of dissatisfaction. Since Han Li was

able to nearly deal Yun Tianxiao a killing blow in a single strike, he naturally knew that he didn't pose a chance and turned his expression away.

Han Li put down the copper plate and indifferently spoke to its owner, "I want this item. How many spirit stones for it?"

The dark-skinned cultivator was slightly surprised and instinctively responded, "Seven... No, five thousand spirit stones!"

Han Li then took out a grade five demon core and promptly dropped it in front of the other person.

"I'll use the demon core to trade for it", Han Li then turned to Lady Fan and said, "Moreover, don't say that I robbed you of this woman. The materials on the table can be considered payment for her." Han Li patted the shoulder of Wen Siyue and let go of her. He then stood up and unhurriedly walked towards the exit.

Wen Siyue finally woke up a short moment later and hurried after him in a somewhat flustered manner.

Lady Fan's expression stirred and she suddenly yelled, "Senior Li, please slow down!"

Han Li halted his steps, and he turned around with an odd expression on his face.

Han Li found it quite interesting that the woman was actually courageous enough to call out to him. Wen Siyue grew nervous at this and unconsciously drew closer to Han Li.

Han Li narrowed his eyes and indifferently asked, "What is it?"

"Does Senior wish to return to the Inner Star Seas? Our Exquisite Sound Sect will have a method of returning everyone to the Inner Star Seas in the near future." Lady Fan sweetly smiled, speaking with an obviously respectful tone. As it was very likely she was speaking to a Nascent Soul cultivator, she didn't dare to be negligent.

Han Li frowned and asked, “What do you mean by that?” He wasn’t interested in hearing elusive words.

Seeing that Han Li was still patient, she didn’t dare to put up any pretenses and hastily said, “Our Exquisite Sound Sect is currently preparing a transportation formation to return to the Inner Star Seas. We are currently lacking a few crucial materials. As the formation cannot be completed without them, we hosted this trade meeting in the hopes of acquiring everyone’s assistance. So long as you assist in the creation of the transportation formation, our Exquisite Sound Sect will send you back to the Inner Star Seas free of charge.”

Lady Fan’s words caused the other Core Formation cultivators to become restless. A majority of them revealed pleasant surprise. The Outer Star Seas had already become the dominion of demon beasts. They couldn’t stay here for much longer. As such, they had naturally thought of returning. However, there were no transportation formations, and it would take more than six hundred years to return at the speed of their flight, not to mention the many dangers they would encounter along the way. They remained here only out of an inability to leave.

The white-haired old woman’s expression stirred and she coldly asked, “Even with the transportation formation, won’t we need displacement talismans? Don’t tell us that the Exquisite Sound Sect has already grasped how to refine them?”

“Senior, please don’t be worried. Although our Exquisite Sound Sect cannot refine these talismans, we acquired quite a few of them before the Beast Torrent. We currently have more than enough to send everyone back to the Scattered Star Seas. The most important material for the formation is Phantasm Stone. It is truly rare. Although we’ve found a deposit of this stone during our search for it over these past few years, it happens to be located near the resting area of a group of high grade demon beasts. A majority of them are at grade five and six, and they are great in number. It

isn't something that can be done with a small number of cultivators. Moreover, if any of them are allowed to escape, they will alert higher grade demon beasts, resulting in disaster. Thus, our sect requires everyone's strength!" Lady Fan spoke with a righteous expression.

After hearing this, the others wore a pensive expression. Cleanly exterminating a group of demon beasts wasn't something that could be easily agreed to. They had to carefully think about it.

The dark-skinned cultivator muttered to himself for a moment before slowly asking, "Why didn't you ask a Nascent Soul cultivator for assistance instead of Core Formation cultivators? The certainty of success would've been higher."

"Do you Fellow Daoists think that I didn't try? However, most of those venerable Seniors had completely vanished after the Beast Torrent. I was only able to get into contact with Senior Swift Crane. With that person joining us, we would've been able to deal with the grade seven demon beasts. He was the one who fancied Siyue to be his cultivation vessel." Lady Fan bitterly smiled and glanced in Han Li's direction.

When the other cultivators heard this, they looked at each other in dismay.

When Han Li heard this, he rubbed his chin and muttered to himself for a moment. He then promptly said, "I have no interest in this endeavor. Deal with it yourselves." With that said, he ignored them and headed out.

Wen Siyue didn't dare to fall behind and quickly followed after him.

Nobody dared to block Han Li. They could only gaze after him as he left.

Lady Fan wore an expression of unconcealed disappointment.

As for Yun Tianxiao, he finally began to speak once more, "Since

Fellow Daoist Li is unwilling to assist us, we won't force any of you either. We will now introduce some information on the demon beasts nearby the Phantasm Stone. Please come to your own decisions after the details have been explained. Here..." As if he hadn't been heavily injured, Yun Tianxiao began to ceaselessly speak.

...

"Senior, do you truly not wish to return to the Inner Star Seas?" Wen Siyue muttered from behind Han Li.

Without turning his head around, Han Li aloofly replied, "Why? Do you want to return?"

"I also don't wish to, it's just..." Wen Siyue's voice grew soft until she ceased speaking.

At that moment, Han Li had already brought her past the stone wall. Since his objective had already been accomplished, he naturally had no interest in staying here any longer.

Han Li brought Wen Siyue outside of the concealed city, much to the astonishment of the old gatekeeper. He then wrapped the woman in his light and took off into the skies.

Wen Siyue was silent as they flew, and didn't ask him any questions about their destination. It seemed she was leaving everything entirely up to Han Li.

Han Li also hadn't thought to give her any further explanation and continued to fly in stifled silence.

Two days later, Han Li eventually found a desolate island with meager spiritual Qi and descended.

Chapter 540: Concubine

The island had several mountains that rose above three hundred meters, and were lush with verdant forestry and filled with many trees.

Han Li circled around the mountains before descending onto one of them with Wen Siyue in tow.

Under the woman's astonished gaze, Han Li released his flying swords and carved a small cave residence into the mountain after a few hours. Although the cave residence was less than half the size of his cave residence in the misty island and was far more crude, it still had a bedroom, and seclusion room, along with a tool refinement room, medicinal garden and so on.

Han Li appeared quite satisfied and placed down several formation spells around it before bringing Wen Siyue inside.

Han Li brought Wen Siyue into the bedroom and sat on a hurriedly carved stone chair. After examining the woman, he leisurely said, "You will be living here from now on. I will tell you the incantations for the spell formations. This place is quite secluded. If you diligently cultivate, there is a chance you'll enter Core Formation."

"Many thanks, Senior Li!" Wen Siyue blushed underneath Han Li's gaze, appearing to be at a complete loss about what to do.

Han Li smiled, "Senior Li?"

Wen Siyue hastily hung her pretty head and hesitantly said, "Sorry... Should I call you...?"

Having just become his concubine, she didn't know how she should address him.

Han Li rubbed his nose and indifferently said, "You can call me Mister Li!" Han Li had yet to reveal his true appearance. He had still assumed the form of a middle-aged man.

After a moment of hesitation, Wen Siyue obediently replied, “Yes, Mister Li!”

Han Li nodded his head with satisfaction and thought about what he should say. He then softly asked, “When did Fellow Daoist Wen arrive at the Scattered Star Seas, and how did Lady Fan become the Exquisite Sound Sect’s Sect Leader? According to my knowledge, Fairy Violet Spirit should’ve been the sect leader.”

“Yi! Mister Li seems quite knowledgeable of the sect’s past.” Wen Siyue was quite amazed that Han Li had made inquiries about the Exquisite Sound Sect instead of hurriedly asking about the demon beast nest.

But after some thought, she opened her almond lips and explained, “The Exquisite Sound Sect was entirely managed by the Young Sect Master before we teleported to the Outer Star Seas. But while she was out at Heavenvoid Hall, a startling change occurred when we returned to the sect. The Envoy of the Left disappeared without a trace and all of the power in the sect fell into the hands of an outsider and the Envoy of the Right, Lady Fan. I later discovered that this cultivator was a Devil Dao cultivator and that the Exquisite Sound Sect had already become a vassal of the Devil Dao. In order to establish herself as sect master, Lady Fan immediately gathered together a large number of disciples and sent us through Heavenly Star City’s transportation formation. At the time, I had been coerced into travelling along. Since then, our sect has handled this hidden city. The disloyal female disciples have been mysteriously disappearing over the past few years and those that have been given away were never seen again. Were it not for Mister Li saving my life earlier, I fear I would’ve become a cultivation vessel.” Wen Siyue dimly said.

Han Li’s expression stirred. Hiding his intentions, he asked, “What did your Sect Master Fan do in the Outer Star Seas? It can’t be that she only managed the hidden city!”

“I am not too sure about this. However, Lady Fan and that Devil

Dao cultivator surnamed Yun were gathering all sorts of information with the assistance of the hidden city as if they were looking for something.” Wen Siyue spoke with uncertainty and an expression of doubt appeared on her face.

When Han Li heard this, he ceased asking questions and started to mull over what she had said. It seemed a violent usurpation had occurred while he and Fairy Violet Spirit were trapped in Heavenvoid Hall.

With the successful usurpation of power, Lady Fan immediately brought large quantities of disciples to Wondrous Depths Island. Afterwards, the Starfall Coalition had launched an attack on Heavenly Star City. It seemed that regardless of how the Devil Dao took over the Exquisite Sound Sect, it was clear that the influence of the Starfall Coalition was immense. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have been able to take over the sect at such an opportune time.

By the time Fairy Violet Spirit returned from Heavenvoid Hall, she would’ve discovered that her sect was gone.

As for the Devil Dao powers, they were drawing support from the Exquisite Sound Sect to find someone or something in the Outer Star Seas. This was yet another mysterious aspect that had nothing to do with Han Li. Hence, he was disinclined to further ask about it. Furthermore, he had already become irreconcilable enemies with Daoist Master Swift Crane, and it seemed the current Exquisite Sound Sect had a relationship with him. As such, Han Li was even more unwilling to be tied down by them and had refused Lady Fan’s proposal.

As for returning to the Inner Star Seas, Han Li wasn’t even considering the matter until after he broke through his bottleneck. While it was true that demon beasts were running amuck in this land, with the greatly desired Heavenvoid Cauldron in his hands, the Inner Star Seas might not necessarily be safer.

Han Li repeatedly mulled over Wen Siyue’s words in his mind

after a short moment. He found nothing that sounded incorrect; to the best of his knowledge, she was telling the truth.

It was only natural for Han Li to be this careful, as he possessed the famed Heavenvoid Cauldron. Who knows how many Nascent Soul Eccentrics wanted to lay their hands on it. Even since ancient times, countless men had suffered from the wily tricks of beautiful women. Han Li didn't wish to become one of them out of a moment of carelessness.

But of course, the odds of this woman attempting to deceive him were next to nothing. He had suddenly appeared before her as a person that nobody recognized and brought her to an unknown place. He was also under the effect of a secret technique that even early Nascent Soul cultivators couldn't see through.

At that moment, Wen Siyue saw Han Li's expression fluctuate, and she unconsciously revealed a trace of restlessness.

Having finally collected his thoughts, Han Li noticed the beautiful woman's peculiarity. He faintly smiled and said, "I've already brought you away from the hidden city, and I've even arranged this location for you. How about you tell me about the location of the demon beast nest? After you tell me, I'll immediately head off and you'll never see me again."

Wen Siyue blankly stared for a moment before revealing surprise, "Senior doesn't intend on taking me in as a concubine?"

Han Li calmly said, "I am used to travelling alone. I don't need anybody following after me."

After a moment of silence, her beautiful face wore a complicated expression and she gently shook her head. After a strange emotion flickered within her eyes, she serenely said, "Many thanks for Mister Li's kindness! But since I've already decided to become your concubine, I don't have any thoughts of reneging on it. Senior, please be at ease, Siyue will keep her promise without complaint."

Han Li clearly understood the woman's apprehension, and he couldn't help but mysterious smile, saying, "I don't know what Fellow Daoist Wen intends, but my words hold firm. If Fellow Daoist truly wishes to settle the matter and become my wife, I won't further decline. When that happens, Fellow Daoist Wen had better not regret it!"

He was certain that Wen Siyue didn't want to become anybody's concubine. The conditions raised in the hidden city were most likely raised out of helplessness.

Although being a concubine was far better than being a cultivation vessel, there weren't any Foundation Establishment woman that would be willing to become someone else's concubine. This only happened in desperate circumstances or under coercion.

Although Han Li felt quite tempted by Wen Siyue's exceptional beauty, he clearly understood that he was at a crucial point in his cultivation. He couldn't afford to keep a Foundation Establishment woman by his side. It would be far better to let her go free and drop the subject!

"I..." Doubts began to surface after Han Li explained his words. Hesitation appeared on her face.

A trace of amusement appeared within his eyes. Han Li softly said, "What? Don't tell me that Fellow Daoist still wishes to become my concubine?"

"No!" Wen Siyue's hurriedly refused and after a moment's pause, she bit her lip and saluted Han Li, saying, "I... I must give many thanks to Mister Li! Junior Wen Siyue will never forget your kindness!" Her expression was filled with anxious fright.

"Since that is the case, let's drop the matter of being a concubine. There is no need for Fellow Daoist Wen to take it seriously." Han Li had no intentions of deliberately making this difficult.

"Many thanks, Mister Li!" Wen Siyue was joyfully surprised! Her

expression relaxed and her flowery beauty blossomed, producing an emotionally stirring scene.

Upon seeing this, Han Li felt a ripple of emotion, but he quickly buried this emotion at the bottom of his heart.

After calming himself, Han Li serenely asked, “Fellow Daoist Wen, how about telling me about the Wind Breaker Beast!”

Wen Siyue’s smile disappeared. She said with a worried tone, “Mister Li, the Windbreaker Beast’s nest is somewhat dangerous. It is near the edge of the depths. Please clearly consider it for a moment before heading out to the nest.”

“The edge of the depths?” Han Li frowned. It seemed this would prove quite troublesome.

The current depths were beyond dangerous!

Chapter 541: Six Arms and Three Heads

After asking a few more questions about the Windbreaker's Nest, Han Li casually handed a bottle of medicine pills over to Wen Siyue. Wen Siyue was immediately grateful and promptly entered seclusion to refine their medicinal power. Han Li then sealed himself off inside of another room and began studying the copper plate.

He carefully examined the item as he sat down cross-legged.

Only one side of the copper plate was inscribed with characters, the other was engraved with a bizarre depiction of a rather formidable looking monster. The monster had three heads with vicious eyes along with six arms raised towards the sky. It was unclear what it was supposed to be doing.

After looking at it for a moment with a frown, Han Li took out the old hide book with the nameless incantation and compared the characters that were inscribed. He discovered that the characters were largely the same except for minute differences. It seemed they shared an origin, but were written in distinctly different styles of writing.

Since he couldn't find anything hidden on the surface, Han Li inserted his magic power into the copper plate without any hesitation.

Soon after it started to absorb his magic power, the copper plate let out a clear hum and started to tremble. It then brilliantly flourished with white light and beams of dense yellow light began to shoot out from the sides of the copper plate, projecting a picture onto the wall.

Han Li was delighted by the developments and became mesmerized by what he saw.

The image depicted a human-form demon beast, covered with

scales and with a single horn on its head. It appeared exactly the same as the three-headed, six-armed demon beast on the back of the plate, but with only one head.

Just as Han Li was puzzled by this, the picture changed with a flash of light. It now depicted the demon beast sitting down cross-legged with its hands clutched in a strange hand gesture. Its entire body was contorted in a baffling position, leaving Han Li puzzled.

A short moment later, the image changed again, revealing that the demon beast had changed its hand incantation and its body contorted once more, assuming another strange posture.

The images periodically shifted to reveal indescribable changes in hand gestures and posture as if it were cultivating some sort of technique. An hour later, the copper plate's light dimmed and the images disappeared.

Han Li had counted thirty-six different positions that the demon beast assumed.

He rubbed his nose and looked at the item in his hand with an odd expression. Although he didn't know what the characters on the copper plate had meant, he was able to tell from the pictures that this item wasn't something for human cultivators. It clearly recorded a demon cultivation art.

Prior to this, he hadn't known that demon beasts even cultivated. Weren't demon beasts innately capable of absorbing spiritual Qi? Why would they cultivate? It seemed that cultivation arts should quite important to demon beasts that were capable of taking human form.

However, Han Li looked at the copper plate in his hands without knowing whether he should laugh or cry. Even if he could understand the words on it, would he dare to cultivate a demon cultivation art? Besides, he currently had no shortage of high grade techniques. The complete collection of Profound Yin Arts was still snugly placed inside his storage pouch.

With that thought, it was no wonder the dark-skinned cultivator had deliberately mystified the item during the trade meeting. It was completely useless! Han Li felt like a fool and grew gloomy.

Since the inscription on the copper plate was a cultivation art specifically for demons, he wouldn't be able to decipher them no matter how many human jade slips he looked through. It seemed the contents of the old hide book were the same.

Han Li let out long breath and placed the two items into his storage pouch with a wretched expression before leaving the stone room.

Han Li felt somewhat disappointed after having his expectations dashed. However, his mood quickly adjusted as he made preparations to head to the Wondrous Depths. Acquiring the high grade Demon Echo Grass was currently his top priority. It was directly able to help him reach an entirely higher level on his path to Immortality!

After he consumed the rainbow beads, he could feel his cultivation aptitude continue to change for the better over the years. Although he couldn't compare to those with Heavenly Spiritual Roots or other outstanding geniuses, he was now able to absorb and refine spiritual Qi at the level of cultivators with three element spiritual roots.

The Heavenmend Pill truly deserved its reputation! Han Li's chance at condensing a Nascent Soul was now a sliver higher.

When Han Li left the room, Wen Siyue was still in seclusion. He reckoned that she would need another three months in order to refine all of the medicine.

Han Li didn't bother her. After some further thought, he left behind several magic tools along with the control incantations for the cave residence's spell formations before departing from the island.

Han Li looked around while in the sky and determined his direction before flying off towards the Wondrous Depths.

Along the way, Han Li came across several demon beasts and ruthlessly exterminated them. As for any humans he saw, he ignored them and continued on his way.

Han Li eventually arrived at the vicinity of the Wondrous Depths after traveling for a month.

At that time, he started to conceal his aura and began to hide his tracks. As these seas are under the dominion of higher grade demon beasts, Han Li naturally had to be extremely careful. He didn't dare to rely on his luck.

As expected, Han Li came across many demon beasts along the way, but with his remarkable concealment techniques, he was able to avoid their attention.

Several days later, Han Li stopped in the air and stared at a small island in the distance with a solemn expression.

The island was the grade eight demon beast nest that Wen Siyue had spoken of. Han Li didn't dare to boldly rush into it. If the ancient Windbreaker Beast was present on the island, he would be certain to die. For this same reason, he only swept his eyes over the island, not daring to release his spiritual sense.

Han Li spotted a reef emerging from the ocean far from the island and placed a small formation on it. He then sat on it and quietly meditated as he kept watch on the island. He wouldn't easily take action until he could predict the grade eight demon beast's movements.

Unfortunately, the Rainbow Skirt Grass had no effect on demon beasts that were grade eight and higher. Otherwise, he would've already used the grass to lure the ancient Windbreaker Beast away, instead of choosing to bitterly stand watch here.

Day after day passed with Han Li gazing at the island from the

reef. Several months eventually went by without Han Li spotting any signs of demon beast movements.

He eventually grew dreary from the waiting.

‘Could it be that the developing demon beast isn’t on the island right now and the Windbreaker Beast abandoned its nest?’ Han Li suspiciously thought.

Yet another month passed with no developments.

Helpless, Han Li finally came to the decision to enter the island and investigate. He wasn’t about to waste several years on the reef.

Early in the morning of the next day, just as sunlight began to illuminate the sky, Han Li restrained all of the spiritual Qi in his body and stealthily flew onto the island.

He had already observed the small island for several months and knew its terrain like the back of his hand. He flew halfway up the mountain and spotted a few boulders concealing a pitch-black cave, just as Wen Siyue had described.

Han Li narrowed his eyes. After placing several auxiliary magic techniques on his body and releasing his disguise, his body disappeared without a trace. Han Li then carefully entered the cave and slowly released his spiritual sense, occasionally probing his surroundings.

The cave was exceptionally deep, and the deeper he went, the more damp it became. After the time it took to finish a cup of tea, Han Li stopped at a corner with a nervous expression on his face.

Han Li slowly closed his eyes and scouted forward with his spiritual sense. Shortly after, an odd expression appeared on his face. Han Li then gritted his teeth and hesitantly turned the corner.

Light suddenly shined before him to reveal a huge natural cavern. It was at least three hundred meters wide and over thirty meters tall. The walls and the ceiling flickered with green light and

it had a dark-blue pool of water at the center that appeared to be piping hot. There was strange vegetation growing around the pool.

When Han Li's gaze fell onto the vegetation, he spotted several stalks of something short and jet-black. Excitement flickered within his eyes.

The stalks were the Demon Echo Grass that he was looking for!

Demon Echo Grass would only turn black when growing near grade eight demon beasts! It was grey when growing near lower grades. As Han Li gazed at the pond at the center, delight momentarily appeared on his face before it was soon replaced with solemnness.

If the Windbreaker Beast was in the cave, it would most likely be inside of the pool. Although he had swept over the pool with his spiritual sense, the pool was extremely deep. He had only inspected a small portion of it.

Han Li licked his lips and steeled his heart. His body blurred before reappearing at the side of the pool. He gently clapped his storage pouch and took out a jade box, he then quickly reached toward the ground with his free hand.

Chapter 542: Grade Nine Demon Cultivator

He quickly harvested the Demon Echo Grass and placed it into the jade box, dirt and all.

Click. Han Li smoothly closed the lid of the jade box with a trace of joy.

It was beyond his expectations, how simple it had been to acquire the Demon Echo Grass. However, he couldn't stay there any longer. Han Li immediately turned around and was about to set off when he heard a calm voice from behind him.

“You stayed nearby for so long just to get those plants? Human cultivators are truly baffling!” These words were spoken by a strange male voice.

Han Li's expression greatly changed and his face became extremely unsightly. He soon forced himself to calm down and turned around in a blur.

He caught sight of an azure-robed figure that was looking at him with obvious curiosity.

Upon clearly seeing the figure's appearance, Han Li grimaced.

The demon cultivator had a silver scarf around the top of his head, azure robes on his body, and rough shoes on his feet. Apart from his sharp, pointy nose and narrow, green eyes, all other aspects were indistinguishable from a human.

Han Li frantically examined the man several times.

With this demon beast's nearly perfect human form, could it be a legendary grade nine or ten demon beast?

Han Li's body grew rigid and his hands had already fastened on his Five Element Bands and his spirit beast pouch. However, he didn't dare to attack.

“Your esteemed self watched me for quite some time.” Han Li

could hear that his voice had become unpleasantly hoarse.

When the demon cultivator heard this, his expression stirred. He then smiled, revealing his pure white teeth and narrowing his eyes, saying, “That’s right, I knew you were there from the day you arrived. I merely thought you were a human cultivator passing by and hadn’t paid you any attention. But who would’ve thought that before the day passed, you would sit on the coral reef nearby. I, Feng, have grown quite curious indeed.”

Not knowing whether or not it was a trick of the mind, Han Li felt that the man’s teeth were somewhat sharp and faintly glinted with a chilling light. Han Li’s heart dropped even further as he thought, ‘His surname is Feng? Then he must be the fully grown Windbreaker Beast[1. The surname ‘Feng 风’ that the demon cultivator uses the same ‘Wind 风’ in ‘Windbreaker Beast’].’

Han Li forced a smile and asked, “Since that was the case, why didn’t you attack me?”

The Windbreaker Beast weirdly smiled and said, “I actually wished to come see you sooner, but I’ve only recently reached the second stage of my metamorphosis. While stabilizing it, it was difficult for me to go outside. As it just so happened, I actually finished stabilizing my form just now and was going to leave, but I hadn’t expected that Fellow Daoist would run into my lair of your own accord. That was quite surprising.”

“Second stage metamorphosis? Could it be that you have entered grade nine?” Han Li’s face grew pale and his hands had unknowingly become lined with cold sweat.

The fully matured Windbreaker demon cultivator blinked and casually replied, “Grade nine? That’s just how you humans differentiate us demons. Regardless, I reached the second grade of the metamorphosis stage, which would be the equivalent of what you call grade nine demon beasts.”

Han Li grew silent when he heard the demon’s calm recognition.

After a short moment, the corner of his mouth twitched into a bitter smile.

Were it a grade eight demon beast, he figured he would still have a chance at escape. But in the face of a grade nine demon cultivator, he had no hopes of breaking free. It seemed his death would be the result of something entirely unavoidable.

With that thought, Han Li said nothing further and suddenly opened his mouth, spitting out over ten streaks of azure light that circled around him. He then raised his hand, intending on opening his spirit beast pouches.

But in that instant, the demon cultivator moved.

He blurred before Han Li's eyes and snatched the spirit beast bag out of his hand.

Although the many flying swords protecting Han Li had moved to block the demon cultivator, he was far too quick. He had returned to his original spot before the swords could strike him.

After a moment of overwhelming astonishment, Han Li's face turned ashen. How could he have forgotten that the Windbreaker Beast was originally known for its amazing speed? Their speed as a grade nine demon beast was nearly identical to teleportation at such a short distance. There was no chance of even injuring him.

In that instant, a chaotic torrent of thoughts began to surge through his mind. Han Li's ashen complexion underwent yet another change as he slapped his storage pouch and took out a ball of radiant golden threads.

Han Li quickly grabbed onto the ball and swallowed it. Afterwards, he wordlessly gazed at the azure-robed demon cultivator.

He had already decided that when he faced death's door, he would ignite the Celestial Ice Pearl with his Divine Devilbane Lightning. This way, even if mutual destruction wasn't

accomplished, the opponent would still suffer a heavy injury.

The demon cultivator revealed astonishment upon seeing Han Li's baffling actions, but he soon nonchalantly smiled, "Hehe! There is no need for Fellow Daoist to be so anxious. I hold no malicious intentions towards you." He casually tossed the spirit beast pouch up and down in his hand as he spoke.

Han Li frowned and coldly said, "What do you mean? Aren't you demon beasts currently exterminating human cultivators?"

He didn't wish to be played around with before he died.

The corner of the demon cultivator's mouth twitched and he shook his head, saying, "The demon beasts that have been killing you off are only the nearby sea races. I have nothing to do with them. I'm merely staying here for the time being because I enjoy the geyser pool here."

Han Li was stunned.

He suddenly recalled that Windbreaker Beasts were demon beasts that lay somewhere between demon birds and sea beasts. As such, they couldn't truly be considered demon beasts of the sea. Furthermore, from his tone, it seemed as though he wasn't even originally from around here.

'Could it be he truly doesn't wish to kill me?' Han Li's expression wavered for a moment. After a short moment, he retrieved his flying swords into his body with a wave of his hand and his expression relaxed.

Since his flying swords weren't able to deal with the demon cultivator either way, he may as well play along. If worst comes to worst, he would just detonate the Celestial Ice Pearl.

The demon cultivator wore a satisfied expression after seeing Han Li put away his magic treasures.

"I do enjoy talking with sensible humans. I'll return this to you first." He didn't view the spirit beast pouch as a threat and threw it

back to Han Li.

Han Li caught it and felt somewhat more at ease.

The demon cultivator stared at Han Li and said, “Does Fellow Daoist have any interest in paying a visit to my true cave residence? This would be the first time I’ve ever invited a human cultivator.”

Although the demon cultivator’s tone was polite, how could Han Li possibly refuse? He had no option but to nod with a forced smile.

The demon cultivator appeared happy when Han Li agreed. He wordlessly raised his hand and a blue ball of light appeared within it. The light then grew several times larger and enveloped Han Li.

Shock appeared on Han Li’s face, but he didn’t resist. With a flash of blue light, the demon cultivator began dragging him within the bubble of light that enveloped him. Then, both of them dropped into the pool with a splash.

Because of the faint blue light that was emitted from the bubble around him, Han Li was able to clearly see the world underneath the water. Perhaps it was due to the strange water in the pool, but there were no other animals apart from some strange palm-sized white fish. There was also no sea vegetation.

The demon cultivator saw that Han Li was completely captivated by the underwater scene and just smiled.

After the time it took to finish a meal, the bubble came to a stop and trembled for a moment before shooting off to the side.

In the blink of an eye, Han Li spotted a huge black stone gate in front of him. The gate flickered with white light as if it was covered by a restriction.

The demon cultivator pointed at the stone door and politely said, “We’ve arrived. Welcome to my humble home. I hope Fellow Daoist doesn’t find it too funny.”

Han Li forced a smile, but remained silent.

As soon as the bubble touched the stone gate, the stone gate opened to reveal a layer of white light. After they passed through it, they entered a completely dry passageway. The bubble surrounding Han Li then disappeared.

The stone walls were embedded with all sorts of small pearls that reflected light, filling the passageway with dazzling light reminiscent of daylight. These weren't ordinary pearls. They were pearls that are only found at the ocean's deepest depths within spirit oysters and the like that were over a thousand years old. They had the strange effect of repelling both water and fire.

"Please come in, Fellow Daoist!" The demon cultivator couldn't help but feel proud upon seeing Han Li's astonishment.

Han Li gazed down the passageway with complete unwillingness in his heart. But with a grade nine demon beast staring at him, he could only force himself to head in first.

The azure robed demon cultivator leisurely followed after him.

The passageway couldn't be considered large, and Han Li soon found himself in a gorgeous hall decorated with all kinds of coral.

At the center of the hall, there was a sparkling white jade table with several chairs made from the same beautiful jade. The corners of the hall each had a small elegant pot with a finger-thick joss stick burning within. It filled the hall with a faint fragrance.

Chapter 543: Jadefire Wine

“Fellow Daoist, please sit!” The demon cultivator boldly took a seat and beckoned to Han Li.

Han Li took a seat across from the demon cultivator and remained silent.

The demon cultivator narrowed his eyes and gently said, “It seems I’ve embarrassed myself. I still haven’t asked for your esteemed name. My name is Feng Xi.”

After a moment of hesitation, Han Li slowly said, “My surname is Li!”

“Hehe, so it’s Fellow Daoist Li. You must feel somewhat confused. In truth, if any other cultivator had appeared before me, I would’ve definitely slain them despite not being from the local sea race. Peaceful coexistence between humans and demons is certainly impossible.”

Han Li felt his heart tremble and forced a smile, asking, “In that case, does Senior Feng see something different about Junior?”

Feng Xi’s eyes flickered with green light. He slowly said, “You are only a mid Core Formation cultivator, yet you dared to bravely enter so deeply into the seas, relying on that marvelous Qi Restraint Technique of yours!”

“Qi Restraint Technique?” Han Li paused for a moment, suddenly recalling the nameless incantation in the hide book.

Feng Xi wore an odd expression and said, “That’s right, I am somewhat familiar with your Qi Restraint Technique. I saw it from an old friend of mine, but strangely enough, that technique is something that was secretly passed down. How are you, a human cultivator, capable of using it?”

Han Li couldn’t easily mention the matter of the hide book and remained silent for a while, not knowing how to respond.

When Feng Xi looked at Han Li's expression, he leaned back into his chair and smiled. He then casually said, "There is no need for Fellow Daoist to be worried. My old friend has been dead for many years, and I'm not looking for an explanation. I am merely curious about how a human can use a secret demon race technique. The main reason why I haven't attacked you is actually because you cultivate a pure wood attribute cultivation art. Otherwise, you'd already be dead."

Han Li revealed amazement. He was truly shocked to hear that the main reason he wasn't attacked was because of the attribute of his cultivation art.

When Feng Xi saw Han Li's shocked expression, he said nothing and waved his arms instead, summoning a simple gold pot with a flash of white light.

He then took a jade wine cup and poured a dark green liquid into it. In the blink of an eye, the concentrated smell of alcohol spread throughout the hall.

The human-form demon beast then took a deep breath and wore an infatuated expression on his face. He flicked the cup with his finger, smoothly sliding the jade cup over to Han Li.

Feng Xi stared at Han Li and deeply said, "Fellow Daoist Li, take a taste of my Jadenfire Wine. I made it myself. It is a genuine spirit wine that takes over a hundred years to ferment, and provides slight gains towards cultivation. Perhaps Fellow Daoist could even use this opportunity to break through his bottleneck!"

When Han Li heard this, he paused in surprise before staring down at the green liquid in the cup. The demon cultivator was able to tell that his cultivation was stuck at a bottleneck, his abilities are truly remarkable. But Han Li found it dubious that the wine could help him break through his bottleneck.

He had consumed no small number of medicine pills for cultivation progression. If he could break through the cultivation

bottleneck with medicinal power, he would've already cultivated to the ninth layer of the Azure Essence Sword Art. Furthermore, as he had no idea about what the other party intended, he didn't dare to casually drink the wine.

As these thoughts churned through his mind, Han Li's face revealed hesitation.

A cold glint shone within the demon cultivator's eyes. His expression grew sullen upon seeing Han Li's hesitation and he coldly said, "What? Are you scared that I did something to the wine. Don't forget, if I wanted to take your life, it would only take me an instant!"

Han Li's face paled and his gaze fell upon the wine cup. He then summoned the courage to say, "Senior is correct. However, Junior wishes to figure something out first: the true reason why Senior hasn't killed me. Junior will be ill at ease until he understands."

It had become obvious that the demon cultivator wished for Han Li to drink the wine. As a result, Han Li's doubts only became greater.

Feng Xi felt somewhat surprised and an icy expression soon appeared on his face. His body released an eerie aura.

Han Li felt his heart drop and the true essence in his body wrapped around the Celestial Ice Pearl in his body. He cautiously stared at the demon cultivator in silence.

A short moment later, Feng Xi frowned and his expression relaxed.

After muttering to himself for a moment, Feng Xi said with a low voice, "It seems by not telling Fellow Daoist the specifics, he has misunderstood my good intentions."

"This Jadenfire Wine is not only difficult to refine and takes a hundred years to ferment, but it also requires a metamorphosis stage demon core as its primary ingredient. Additionally, only

Windbreaker Beasts are able to refine the wine. Even if other demon cultivators had the formula, they would be unable to refine the wine due to lacking the innate abilities. To me, this wine serves only to satisfy my tastes. But to a Core Formation cultivator such as yourself, it will stimulate the true essence in your body the first time you drink it, possibly allowing you to break through your current bottleneck. Of course, the only reason I am giving you so precious to Fellow Daoist Li is for my own gains. I require the assistance of your wood attribute cultivation arts for something very important. However, a mid Core Formation cultivation is too low. Even late Core Formation cultivation is still a bit lacking. But I see that your own cultivation arts are unordinary. You possess far deeper magic power than cultivators of a similar grade, and as a result, you will do, if just barely. It should now be quite obvious what consequences will follow if Fellow Daoist Li doesn't drink the wine!"

Feng Xi knew that if he didn't give a clear explanation, Han Li wouldn't obediently follow his orders.

When Han Li heard this, his expression changed several times. A short moment later, he spoke with a hoarse voice, "And if I drink this wine and can't breakthrough my bottleneck?"

Feng Xi sneered and calmly said, "Hehe! Then Fellow Daoist Li will no longer serve any purpose for me. Since my Jadefire Wine is quite difficult to refine, I will have to take your life as compensation!"

Although Han Li had already suspected this, his face twitched after hearing the confirmation.

After a short moment of deliberation Han Li's face became resolute and he took a deep breath. "Fine, I'll drink it!"

Feng Xi suddenly wore a happy expression.

Han Li slapped his hand onto the table. Then with a flash of azure light, the dark green liquid from the cup flew into his mouth

in a stream.

The liquid then dropped into his stomach without Han Li even tasting it.

“Good. I knew Fellow Daoist Li would make the sensible decision. Follow me. I’ve already prepared a quiet room for you.” Feng Xi spoke with a satisfied expression and stood up before walking to the side of the hall.

Han Li wordlessly followed after him with a calm expression.

As Han Li followed the demon cultivator, he eventually found himself in front of a fire-red stone wall.

After some further examination, Han Li astonishingly discovered the sparkling red stone wall was actually a huge slab of cut coral rock. As Han Li pondered about it, Feng Xi lightly pushed the stone wall, revealing a three meter wide hole in a flash of white light.

Feng Xi pointed to the hole and tranquilly said, “Refine the wine in this hidden room. According to my estimates, it should only take half a year at most to refine. Fellow Daoist should be able to succeed in that time. When the time arrives, I will release the restriction and allow you to come out.”

Han Li took a glance before expressionlessly entering the hole. At this point, he naturally had no intention of further speaking with Feng Xi.

Just after Han Li walked in, the opening behind him disappeared.

Feng Xi stood outside the wall without immediately departing. He glanced at the wall with a face bizarrely full of excitement. A short moment later, he disappeared without a trace in a flash of white light.

Han Li was currently inspecting the so-called hidden room inside the coral wall. The room couldn’t be considered small, at a hundred meters wide and over twenty meters tall. Apart from a glistening azure jade couch at the center of the room, there was

nothing else.

But what was most baffling to Han Li were the countless small holes that filled the walls. They appeared just like bits of black sesame.

Han Li's face grew gloomy for a moment and he sat down on the jade couch in a cross-legged position. With his eyes closed, he slowly released his spiritual sense from his body.

After a short moment, he spread his spiritual sense across the room and was surprised to discover that the walls repelled it. Soon, he confirmed that there were no gaps that his spiritual sense was able to slip through.

Han Li then frowned, opening his eyes with a cold glint.

After some thought, Han Li sat up from the jade couch and walked towards a side of the room. He inspected the coral wall in front of him with narrowed eyes.

He extended a finger that glowed with blinding azure swordlight toward the wall. The light was only several inches long and continuously glistened.

Chapter 544: Progression

A trace of hope flickered within Han Li's eyes but that was soon replaced with disappointment. The small sword was only able to penetrate several more inches before stopping. A colorful brilliance faintly glowed deeper within the wall, blocking its advance.

The demon cultivator had placed many layers of formidable restrictions within the coral wall. It wasn't very likely Han Li would be able to break through the walls with his magic treasures.

Han Li tightly creased his brow after retrieving the magic treasure and summoning it back into his body. He then unconsciously reached for the spirit beast pouch at his waist. He trusted that regardless of how powerful the wall's restrictions, they wouldn't be able to resist the vicious bites of the Gold Devouring Beetles. However, there was a reason why he didn't rashly release them.

The beetles wouldn't be able to devour the restrictions in a short amount of time. In the time it would take, the demon cultivator Feng Xi would be given plenty of time to perceive their actions. And with the demon's astonishing speed, there was no way for Han Li to escape his pursuit.

After a period of heavy and repeated deliberations, Han Li fiercely glared and then returned to the jade couch with an unsightly expression.

By that time, he already felt a burning sensation in his stomach. It seemed the Jadefire Wine was about to take effect.

Han Li didn't dare to be negligent of the wine as he was ignorant of what, if any, peculiar aspects it might possess. He could only relinquish his thoughts of escape for the moment and start refining Qi.

He sat down cross-legged and closed his eyes, peering into his body. Frowning, Han Li shot out a stream of azure core flame from his tri-colored golden core and compressed the Jadefire Wine into a ball. In the blink of an eye, the stream of core flame had completely restricted the Jadefire Wine.

Not longer after, Han Li became completely still with a blank face.

The Jadefire Wine was refined at an exceptionally slow pace. After the passing of a month, less than a fourth of the wine had been refined. It seemed that Feng Xi wasn't exaggerating when he said that the wine would take half a year for Han Li to refine.

However, this extremely slow speed proved to be rather irritable to Han Li. If he truly was unable to enter late Core Formation, then this Windbreaker Beast named Feng Xi would take his life without any hesitation.

For that reason, he steeled his heart and took the risk of forcing out all of the core flame his golden core could produce. As a result, the azure flame that covered the remaining dark green liquid nearly doubled in thickness. Han Li also spared none of his magic power in his effort to hasten refining the wine.

This resulted in Han Li's magic power expenditure nearly doubling. Each time he nearly ran out of magic power, he lamentably took a drop of the Myriad Year Spirit Milk to ensure that his magic power could persist in fueling the wine refinement.

After two months of this extravagant usage of his core flame, only a third of the wine had yet to be refined. Han Li felt somewhat relieved that the wine would soon be entirely refined.

Unfortunately, something unexpected soon occurred. As a result of his intention to strive his hardest in the face of death, Han Li had swallowed the Celestial Ice Pearl on the day he had encountered the demon cultivator. He continued to keep it there in fear of the demon cultivator, and had yet to take this last resort out

of his stomach.

On a day when Han Li had completely exhausted his magic power and thought to take a drop of the Myriad Year Spirit Milk, the outer layer of the Divine Devilbane Lightning on the Celestial Ice Pearl suddenly grown unsteady.

Han Li, who had been observing his body's interior with full focus, was shocked out of his wits at the sight.

At that moment, his magic power was completely exhausted and he was incapable of taking any emergency measures. With the pearl's exterior wavering before his eyes, he wrapped the remaining Jadenfire Wine around the Celestial Ice Pearl in an act of desperation.

Han Li's heart heavily thumped as he watched on with a bloodless complexion.

Only the Heavens would know what reaction would occur from using the Jadenfire Wine to envelop the Celestial Ice Pearl. As Han Li imagined the pearl erupting, he could feel his body line with ice cold sweat.

Fortunately, whether it was due to sheer luck or due to the Celestial Ice Pearl being stable to begin with, the Celestial Ice Pearl had become tranquil after being enveloped by the wine.

Han Li let out a long breath and wiped the cold sweat off his brow. He felt as if he had just escaped certain death.

He hurriedly swallowed a drop of Myriad Year Spirit Milk. After his magic power had been replenished, he spat out the pearl and put it away with great trepidation lingering in his heart. Placing that item within his body had truly been playing with fire.

After everything was settled, he took another look into his body and flusteredly discovered that he had unknowingly broken through his bottleneck, quietly entering late Core Formation.

Han Li was initially dumbstruck, before being delightfully

surprised.

To tell the truth, he hadn't felt any peculiar effects from the Jadefire Wine. Han Li was absolutely bewildered at having broken through the bottleneck without even completely refining the wine.

With his increased cultivation, Han Li decided to test it out by skillfully controlling twenty-four Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords simultaneously, discovering that his true strength had suddenly increased.

Although Han Li was rapt with joy, he had no intention of squandering the remaining Jadefire Wine, and sincerely spent the next two months refining what was leftover, consolidating his cultivation in the process. Afterwards, he started to rack his mind for what the grade nine Windbreaker Beast intended for him.

As the half year point gradually grew closer, his face grew increasingly sullen with worry occasionally appearing in his eyes.

Several days after the half year point had passed, the coral wall promptly opened. Feng Xi's indifferent voice then entered the room, "Fellow Daoist Li, come out. The time has arrived. Did your cultivation progress?"

Sitting down on the jade couch, Han Li expressionlessly opened his eyes and wordlessly walked out of the room.

Feng Xi was waiting for him outside with narrowed eyes.

The demon cultivator examined Han Li after he left the room. A short moment later, Feng Xi rubbed his palms together and heartily laughed.

"Good, good! Congratulations on Fellow Daoist entering late Core Formation. It seems my Jadefire Wine didn't go to waste." Feng Xi grew quite happy. With Han Li's successful advancement, he truly could serve his purposes.

Han Li's heart stirred upon seeing this.

Feng Xi chuckled and spoke to Han Li with a rather amiable tone, “Fellow Daoist Li, follow me! I will give you an introduction to two of my close demon companions. I will be requiring you three to cooperate in order for this to succeed!”

“There are another two Seniors?” When Han Li heard him, he felt shocked.

“That’s right. My two good friends are both at the initial metamorphosis stage. In human terms, they would be grade eight demon cultivators. However, since both of them were born from primordial races, their true capabilities aren’t all that inferior to my own. Still, it would be best for you to say as little as possible. Since they are genuine members of the local sea clan, they won’t receive a human like you very favorably.” Feng Xi took a deep glance at Han Li and gave him a calm warning.

With a shaken heart, Han Li muttered in agreement.

A short moment later, Feng Xi brought Han Li back to the large hall where he now saw the two close friends that Feng Xi had spoken of.

As a result, Han Li couldn’t help but reveal his shock on his face.

One of them had the head of a flood dragon, a steel tail, and his body was covered with blood-red scales. The other had a rather large body, an azure face and a tortoise shell.

That flood dragon appeared quite similar to the Venemous Flood Dragon that he had previously seen fighting the cultivators near the misty island. As for the other, Han Li faintly guessed that it was most likely the huge tortoise that had been undergoing its tribulation at that time.

When Feng Xi arrived, the two grade eight demon beasts turned their heads over toward them.

When the Venomous Flood Dragon saw Han Li’s expression, his green eyes coldly glinted and he quickly examined Han Li.

“What’s wrong, human? Could it be you’ve seen me before?” He icily asked. Although his voice was somewhat vague, his words could clearly be heard.

Han Li immediately grew hesitant. It appeared that because he had used the blood-red cape back then, his appearance hadn’t been seen. As such, it would be best to avoid mentioning the battle that day; otherwise, he would just be asking for trouble. Leaving him no choice but to deceive the Venomous Flood Dragon.

With that thought, Han Li dryly coughed and with the calmest expression he could muster, he said, “This is the first time I have seen Senior. It is only that Junior’s experience is so shallow that he had yet to see a true Flood Dragon. As such, I forgot my manners. I hope Senior doesn’t take any offense.” Helpless, Han Li assumed the humblest attitude he could to avoid stirring up any trouble.

Chapter 545: Thunderstorm Wings

The Venomous Flood Dragon pulverised the large, shiny pearl that it had originally been playing with in its hand and glanced at Han Li with a malicious glint flickering within his eyes. “Humph! Humans are all so cunning and sly. I don’t care where you’ve seen me before, but you had better cut the clever business!”

Han Li’s heart slightly shivered, but apart from a bitter chuckle, he said nothing else.

Seeing that the atmosphere wasn’t to his liking, Feng Xi hastily interjected himself, “Enough. Fellow Daoist Li can now be considered to be acquainted with you little brothers. I wish to draw from the support of all three of you, and It would be quite troublesome if I were to lack any of you.” He then directed Han Li to a seat that was farther away from those two.

The Venomous Flood Dragon downed the wine in the cup in front of him and carelessly said, “Brother Feng, we’ve known each other for quite a few years already. Why are you treating this matter so mysteriously? You’ve yet to give us an explanation. Additionally, you require the assistance of a human cultivator, and a trifling Core Formation cultivator at that.”

“That’s right. I am also quite curious. You insisted for us two to come together. Could it be that Brother Feng is doing something dangerous?” The demon tortoise with a thick shell on its back frowned. He may possess an extremely large body, but he appeared rather timid.

Feng Xi smiled and slightly spread out his arms. “There is no need to worry, Fellow Daoist Gui. I didn’t call you two over to deal with a formidable enemy, or to travel to a dangerous area. Rather, I wish for your assistance in refining a magic treasure.”

“Refining a magic treasure?” The tortoise and flood dragon paused for a moment before glancing at one another. A trace of

amazement also appeared on Han Li's face.

Feng Xi slowly said with a feverish expression, "That's right, I am preparing to refine a magic treasure to fit onto my own body."

"Did we hear correctly? Brother Feng wishes to refine a magic treasure? Don't tell me you've forgotten that the bodies of us demon cultivators are better than any magic treasure. What material could possibly be refined to be stronger than one's own body?" The Venomous Flood Dragon shook his head in disapproval.

The demon tortoise nodded his head in agreement and said, "Brother Wu's words are undoubtedly true. The might of any magic treasure will undoubtedly be inferior to the innate bodies of us demon cultivators. Rather than wasting time on external items, wouldn't it be better to further cultivate one's own abilities? For example, with regards to Brother Wu's flood dragon constitution, his innate water-attribute techniques have become a hundred times stronger than other races with only slight cultivation. With your spirit aviary constitution, you should have exceptionally good aptitude towards wind attribute techniques. By cultivating your Firestorm Wings to a deeper stage, you should be able to travel tens of thousands of miles in an instant and roam the seas as you please. As for my profound tortoise constitution, although it isn't as remarkable as either of yours, my shell will become invulnerable when it is cultivated to the sentient transformation stage. How could a human refined magic treasure possibly compare?"

Feng Xi didn't grow angry at their words. Rather, he wore a relaxed smile and said, "Given how long I've cultivated, how could I not know this? However, the magic treasure I wish to refine is profound. It is a pair of spiritual wings. With these Thunderstorm Wings, I am confident I will be able to roam the skies without limits!"

"Thunderstorm Wings!" The demon tortoise absently blinked. It

seemed he was at a loss.

“That’s right. A few years ago, when I toured the deep seas for cultivation, I came upon an ancient cultivator’s ruins, and discovered the remains of a huge bird. Although only its silver wing bones remained, they still possessed an astonishing amount of lightning energy. I suspect the wing bones belonged to of a peak metamorphosis stage Lightning Roc. You should know that the Lightning Roc is a primordial bird that possessed extreme speed. It could be considered among the top ten of high-grade, bird-type demon beasts. It’s speed was similar to a flash of lightning, far superior to that of a Windbreaker Beast. Thus, I was struck with a sudden inspiration of bringing the bones back to my cave dwelling and using them along with other bird wing materials to create a human-like magic treasure and affix it to my body.” Feng Xi’s eyes glistened as if he was unable to contain the excitement in his heart.

He then added, “After refining the wing bones, they naturally can’t be solely lightning attribute. A bit of wind attribute spiritual power must be added as well so that I may use them more easily.”

“Is that even possible?” The Venomous Flood Dragon revealed a doubtful expression. The demon tortoise at his side also appeared skeptical.

“Don’t worry. I’ve already spent a year researching the wing. I even went as far as to change my appearance and headed over to the humans for their tool refining texts and instruction. Afterwards, I combined them with my Firestorm Wing refinement methods to come up with the current plans to refine a magic treasure. While I don’t dare to say that success is certain, the odds are at least eighty percent. Of course, you won’t be helping me for nothing. Regardless of whether the magic treasure succeeds...” The Windbreaker Beast spoke confidently. He started speaking in voice transmission, not wishing for Han Li to hear what he said regarding their compensation.

Han Li sat calmly at the side, turning a blind eye to what was

happening. However, he had placed both of his hands on the table unconsciously revealing his annoyance, contrary to his calm expression.

Han Li knew that the three demons' conditions were unfavorable to him. However, he had no rights to be asking questions in their presence. He could only stifle his curiosity and think of his own countermeasures in silence.

After discussing it with the demon tortoise, the flood dragon eventually agreed, "Good, since Brother Feng mentioned those conditions, we will definitely provide our assistance."

Feng Xi was delighted to hear that and confidently smiled, "With your earth attribute techniques you'll be able to use your formation spells to temporarily create lightning attribute spiritual power. I'll be able to combine wind spiritual power into it with my own wind attribute techniques. But in order to balance both powers, we'll require Fellow Daoist Li's wood attribute cultivation arts to counteract any disparities in power from either side. With this, the wind and thunder will hopefully be able to succeed!"

When his gaze fell upon Han Li and saw that he was sitting there without a word, he suddenly thought of something. A strange expression suddenly flickered within his eyes and he gave Han Li a beaming smile, "Fellow Daoist Li, I forgot to tell you. Although the Jadefire Wine can assist in a human's cultivation, the wine was something that was prepared for the consumption of demon cultivators after all. As a result, human cultivators will experience a trace of chaotic malicious Qi. Although there is nothing wrong now, soon enough, the malicious Qi will spread and mix with one's true essence, resulting in a detonation of one's spiritual power."

After he said that, Feng Xi immediately closed his mouth and coldly stared at Han Li in silence. Han Li merely sighed with a frown, displaying neither panic nor fury.

Han Li slowly asked with a tranquil expression, "If Brother Feng

can help me eliminate this malicious Qi, then please speak. Will I only be able to survive if the magic treasure refinement succeeds?”

This caused a trace of surprise to momentarily appear in Feng Xi's eyes. The other two demon beasts also revealed an interested expression upon hearing Han Li.

“Hehe, Fellow Daoist Li is a sensible person. Since you already know this, I won't further speak of it. So long as the Thunderstorm Wings are successfully refined, I will remove this future ailment. But if it fails, you will be the first target of my frustrations. You had best dissolve any fantasies of dissolving it on your own. Even if Nascent Soul cultivators were willing to assist you, They wouldn't be able to eliminate the chaotic malicious Qi leftover from the Jadefire Wine.” He spoke with a chilling voice and displayed not the slightest emotion.

“I know what must be done!” Han Li nodded his head but bitterly smiled in his heart. He also refrained from saying anything in his mind, fearing that it would somehow affect his later performance during the magic treasure refinement.

As Han Li was brimming with the feeling of helplessness, the three demon cultivators were having a leisurely chat at the table.

Feeling that the odds of success with the refinement was high, Feng Xi cheerfully asked the flood dragon, “I heard that Little Brother Wu's flood dragon clan has partaken in the Unfathomable Depth's assault on human cultivators. Is this matter true? I've always recalled that flood dragons hadn't bothered themselves with these matters.”

“Humph! That's right. This time, there are a few experts from our clans that have decided to act. How else could the rubbish from the Unfathomable Depths possibly have succeeded in their attack? Were it not for our assistance, they wouldn't have been able to exterminate the two Nascent Soul cultivators.” The flood dragon didn't bother to conceal the matter in the presence of Han Li.

Although no clear emotion appeared on Han Li's face, he couldn't help but reveal some surprise.

Chapter 546: Sacred Provenance Plate

As Han Li felt bewildered by the flood dragon's comments, Feng Xi chuckled and said, "I heard that a few years ago, when Fellow Daoist Wu had acted as a protector for Brother Gui's tribulation, several human cultivators launched an attack on him. Although you managed to repel them in the end, you suffered a bit of injury. Could it be that as a result of that battle, the flood dragon clan had decided to attack? Your demon clan has always valued protecting their own!"

"In those years, the cultivators of that island were far too arrogant. They truly believed that the seas belonged to them. They even equated us metamorphosed demon cultivators to those low grade demon beasts that had yet to shed their beastly bodies. They were simply asking to be destroyed. My situation was merely one of many triggers for the attack."

With that said, the Savage Flood Dragon paused for a moment before continuing, "But most important of all was the human's attack on a grade seven Lion Dragon[1. Suanni, the hybrid of a lion and a dragon.] from the Unfathomable Depth's Monarch Clan. As a result, the Venerable Lord Lion Dragon didn't hesitate to consume their strength to issue a Myriad Demon Writ, resulting in several tens of thousands of demon beasts laying waste to the human's islands. The reason why my Flood Dragon Clan lent their assistance wasn't as revenge for the Lion Dragon, but rather, for the sacred Sacred Provenance Plate that had been passed down from generation to generation. It was taken away by humans from the Lion Dragon when it was slain. Although it was badly damaged and had no true value, it was an item that has been continuously circulated throughout our demon clans. It cannot be allowed to fall into human hands." The Savage Flood Dragon then flashed a harsh gaze at Han Li.

Feng Xi's expression stirred and he looked at the Flood Dragon

with a strange smile. “I have heard of the Lion Dragon being slain, but nothing of the Sacred Provenance Plate. Could it be that without the inherited keepsake, the Lion Dragon Clan would find it difficult to remain the monarchs of the Unfathomable Depths? Is your flood dragon clan thinking about unseating them?”

“I don’t know much about that. After all, I’ve never taken much interest in the clan’s internal affairs. However, I am very interested in the Three Sacred Provenances Technique recorded on the plate. I’ve heard that the might of these ancient secret techniques are amazing. Unfortunately, those techniques have long since been damaged by time and are impossible to reconstruct.” The flood dragon’s face revealed excitement before being replaced with regret.

The demon turtle suddenly burst into laughter and said, “Hehe! Brother Wu is quite greedy. Those secret desolate techniques are just legends from how I see it. I can’t believe those techniques to be superior to your clan’s Dragonification Arts.”

When the flood dragon heard that, a trace of pride appeared on his face, “That may be. My clan’s Dragonification Arts are capable of turning flood dragons into true dragons when the deepest level is cultivated. As such, it is naturally the peak cultivation art among demons.”

Feng Xi chuckled without adding anything further.

‘The Sacred Provenance Plate?’ When Han Li heard this, he was able to maintain his calm expression despite the restlessness in his heart. He suddenly thought of the copper plate that he had recently acquired.

The copper plate recorded demon cultivation arts that possessed seemingly great might. Could it be that he had happened to acquire the item that the demons were discussing? Although he didn’t know the specific uses of the Sacred Provenance Plate, he came to realize that the item was cause for trouble after hearing that it was

something that was passed down by demon clans from antiquity. Could that dark-skinned cultivator have been the main offender that brought about the Beast Torrent? It wasn't impossible for a mid Core Formation cultivator such as himself to slay a grade seven demon beast.

Han Li didn't feel particularly worried as he mulled over these thoughts.

He could already be considered drowning in misfortune. As his life could be forfeit at any one moment, Han Li couldn't bring himself to care about yet more trouble that had befallen him. It would be better for him to not dwell on any of those matters while he was still here.

At the moment, Feng Xi turned to Han Li and indifferently said, "Fellow Daoist Li, as you've recently entered late Core Formation, you should consolidate your cultivation. I don't wish for you to suddenly be incapable of using your magic power during the magic treasure refinement. Follow after the light and return to your room for a bit of further cultivation."

With that said, he flicked a ball of white light from his fingers, leading out one of the doors.

Without a choice, Han Li could only stand up with a forced smile and follow the light out of the hall. He had actually wished to further listen to the secret matters of the demon clan.

As he walked outside the hall, he suddenly heard Feng Xi indifferently warn him, "Fellow Daoist shouldn't rashly leave the room. Otherwise, I will misunderstand and trouble will arise!"

The three demons behind him saw Han Li slow down before wordlessly continuing on his way.

The flood dragon looked in the direction that Han Li had disappeared with an odd gaze and said, "Is there a problem? From how I see it, the young one doesn't seem resigned. A surprise could

occur during the treasure refinement.”

Feng Xi sneered and said, “Be at ease! The success of the Thunderstorm Wings will mostly depend on us three. The human will merely be a tool to provide wood attribute spiritual power. Once the treasure refinement has started, he will have no control. Not to mention the malicious Qi that is contained in his body. With that in mind, he is completely powerless.”

The demon turtle suddenly smiled and teasingly said, “Now that you mention the chaotic malicious Qi, the Jadenfire Wine shouldn’t have such a thing. Could it be that Brother Feng entrapped him?”

Feng Xi fixed the silver scarf on his head and evilly grinned, “Hehe! Of course. I gave him a specially refined cup of Jadenfire Wine. The malicious Qi should actually be called Devilish Qi. In an encounter with a formidable Devil Dao cultivator, he summoned something he had refined from his body, leaving devilish Qi on my body. It proved quite troublesome to remove.”

When the flood dragon and the tortoise demon heard this, they smiled at each other with their last doubts dispelled.

At that moment, Han Li had followed the white light sphere into a stone room. It was elegantly decorated. Not only was there a couch refined from white jade, there was also a table with a set of chairs along with many pots of rarely seen plants.

After Han Li entered the room, the white light orb suddenly dissolved itself. When Han Li saw this, he immediately closed the door to the stone room and took out several differently colored formation flags from his robes. He placed them at each corner of the stone room and enveloped the room in a small spell formation.

Han Li felt somewhat at ease from being free of the demon cultivators’ surveillance. Although the spell formation had no defensive qualities, it would give early warning of any outsiders’ malicious eavesdropping. Although this would certainly annoy the Windbreaker Beast, he wouldn’t make a big deal over this small

matter.

With that thought, Han Li changed his focus to the most important worries.

He walked in front of the couch and sat cross-legged on it before closing his eyes. After the time it took to brew a cup of tea, Han Li opened his eyes with a furrowed brow.

His body appeared exactly the same as it was before. There was nothing amiss. It seemed the demon was tricking him with false words. He had absolutely no perception of the malicious Qi in his body.

Han Li stroked his chin with a pensive expression. After a moment of deliberation, he suddenly took out an item and examined it for a moment before revealing a harsh expression.

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Two days later, Feng Xi knocked on Han Li's stone door and then walked in.

Upon seeing Han Li, the humanform demon beast wore an excited expression and said, "Let's go. We will be refining the magic treasure today. Fellow Daoists Wu and Gui are waiting for us in the tool refinement room."

He then brought Han Li out of the room and headed towards his tool refinement room.

After following the demon cultivator for a short distance, Han Li arrived in front of an azure jade wall. Feng Xi slapped that wall without any hesitation, causing an arched gate to appear and open. The demon cultivator then stood to the side, indicating for Han Li to enter first.

Han Li first took a quick glance through the door and saw that the room glowed red. He could faintly feel a roasting heat from within.

With eyebrows raised, he took a deep breath before walking in. Han Li's gaze then revealed a trace of astonishment after clearly seeing what was inside.

The flood dragon and demon tortoise were both standing inside the room, but Han Li was more surprised to see the fire within.

There was a square platform that spanned about ten meters at the center of the room. It was filled with roaring scarlet flames. There was a huge, complex refinement formation that surrounded the platform. After taking several quick glances at it, Han Li was left amazed.

With his current knowledge on tool and spell refinement, he could tell how impressive this formation spell was, despite not immediately recognizing its profound complexities. It wasn't something that he was capable of establishing.

The two demon cultivators coldly glanced at Han Li when he walked in before paying him no further heed.

“Alright, everyone has arrived. I've already explained the spell formation's refinement principles to Brothers Wu and Gui. Fellow Daoist Li, all you have to do is stand at the corner of the formation and provide a steady stream of wood attribute spiritual power to the formation. Now that we've come this far, Fellow Daoist Li had better refrain from thinking about anything silly.” Feng Xi pointed to a corner and looked at Han Li with a heavy gaze.

Chapter 547: Lightning Roc Bones

After taking a glance at the pit of earthfire, Han Li responded with a bitter smile, “What use is there in thinking about silly things now?”

“Then it is good that Fellow Daoist understands.” Although Feng Xi said this, he wore a trace of a sneer. It seemed he didn’t believe Han Li’s words.

When Han Li saw this, he managed to preserve a bitter expression on his face, but he inwardly cursed, ‘Damned monster!’ He then walked to a corner of the room and sat down cross-legged.

After seeing that Han Li obediently sat down where he had pointed, Feng Xi nodded his head in satisfaction and turned to the two demons, politely saying, “Brothers, let us enter the formation and prepare!”

When the two demons heard this, they stepped forward without objection, and stood at the formation’s cornerstones as previously discussed.

Feng Xi lightly smiled and patted the storage pouch at his waist. The pouch unhurriedly flew around the earthfire pit before turning upside down and releasing a burst of radiance. A small silver ball of light pierced through the radiance and soon expanded. In the blink of an eye, it revealed a pair of sparkling white wing bones that were each about three meters long.

One of the wings was missing the front half while the other wing was completely shattered. Although they appeared worthless at first glance, these sparkling bone fragments emitted an enormous pressure that left one in awe.

The flood dragon gazed at the bones and clicked his tongue in amazement, “So this is the wing of the Lightning Roc! Although it is extremely damaged, it appears completely genuine. It is

deserving of its title as a bird of desolate antiquity!”

Feng Xi stared at the bones with a feverish expression and said, “That is only natural! The Lightning Roc didn’t die in meditation. The reason why its bones were broken should be because someone had trapped it there and ambushed it. Otherwise, with its amazing speed and its peak metamorphosis stage cultivation, it definitely would’ve been able to flee.”

At that moment, Han Li was glancing at the Lightning Roc wing bones in appreciation.

The demon tortoise didn’t seem to be particularly interested in the bones. After glancing at it for a moment, he said with unusual impatience, “Let us start on refining it. We don’t know how many months it will take!”

Feng Xi paused after hearing this, but he immediately thought of something and broke out into laughter, “Haha! I’ve forgotten that Brother Gui entered metamorphosis stage less than a hundred years ago. He’d naturally feel uneasy towards lightning attribute items. Well then, let us start without delay!”

The flood dragon didn’t raise any opposition to starting.

With that said, the demon beast’s bodies gradually released an astonishing demonic Qi, each filling the room with white, blue, and yellow radiance.

Han Li didn’t know whether the formation spell was activated from the demonic Qi or some other method, but the formation started to glow and slightly sway before it finally started to revolve. The tens of mid grade formation stones that surrounded the formation each began to release a blinding gleam.

Han Li felt restless as he watched the scene occur.

Feng Xi let out a shout and brought his hands together. He parted his hands and shot two arm-thick beams of white light down into the formation. With a low hum being released, the ground began

to tremble for a moment before the earthfire started to rampage at the center of the room.

Fuush. A head-sized ball of flame shot out from the pit and directly floated above the wing bone. The flame then ruptured, enveloping the wing bone in scorching scarlet flames.

The flood dragon and the demon tortoise exchanged a glance before raising their hands and releasing threads of yellow and blue radiance. The numerous, densely-packed threads of radiance penetrated the flames and wrapped around the bones. The bones then began to soften amongst the intertwining lights.

A short moment later, the two used those spirit threads to mold the bones into a more complete shape.

As Han Li watched this, he felt as if his perspective had been greatly widened.

With the other two demons molding the bones, a strange light glinted within Feng Xi's eyes and he grasped his hands in an incantation gesture and repeatedly shifted his ten fingers in a rapid manner.

Tens of thumb-sized balls of white light subsequently appeared and accurately fell upon the bone wings. In that instant, deafening rolls of thunder began to sound out from the flames. The mended wing bones had begun to release countless sparks of lightning. The sparks were extremely slender and shined with silver light. They began to quickly strike and merge into the blue and yellow spiritual threads.

After the spiritual threads absorbed the lightning, it flourished with silver light, overwhelming the threads' original color in an instant..

When Feng Xi saw this, he solemnly stomped the ground, sending a incantation seal into the spell formation.

With several muffled crackles, the variously colored beams of

light began to shoot out from the earthfire pit. Simultaneously, the wing bone's radiance converged into a blinding single point.

Han Li unconsciously narrowed his eyes. By the time his vision had returned to normal, there was a dense, luminous rainbow barrier that had appeared above the earthfire pit.

Han Li's expression stirred for a moment before he managed to recover his expressionless face.

The white wing bones were intensely scorched by the earthfire within the light barrier, but not the slightest change had occurred. Upon seeing this, the three demons all let out a long sigh.

The first step was completed without any mishaps or mistakes.

Afterwards, Feng Xi took out an azure, transparent gem with a relaxed expression and tossed it into the light barrier without any hesitation.

A short moment later, the gem melted into a semi-liquid. Feng Xi hastily released white spirit threads and manipulated the melted gem to evenly coat the Wing Bone's surface. Feng Xi still appeared quite vigilant after all this was done.

He glanced at the other two demons with slight significance and softly said, "Wind." He then took a breath and spat out a white translucent pearl, sending it into the light barrier in an instant.

The flood dragon and demon tortoise didn't dare to delay and also spat out their long cultivated demon cores. The demon cores intertwined with one another as they spun through the air.

Feng Xi raised his hand and struck his demon core with a incantation seal, immediately arousing a white, wind-attribute core flame to wildly erupt from the demon core.

Under the control of the flood dragon and demon tortoise, they also had their demon cores release a finger-dense string of core flame. The blue and yellow strings of flame intertwined with a crackle before turning into a silver flame.

The silver and white flames were then immediately absorbed into the surrounding earthfire, resulting in the earthfire immensely growing in pressure. Afterwards, the spirit infused flames enveloped the wing bones and it slowly began to be refined.

Feng Xi revealed an expression of unconcealed joy on his face and called out to the other two demons before sitting down cross-legged. The flood dragon and demon tortoise soon followed suit.

A moment later, the huge formation spell became deathly quiet.

Silently sitting alone in the corner, a strange expression flickered within Han Li's eyes several times. But after taking a look around, Han Li could only bitterly smile.

Due to some unknown designs of the formations, at the same time the rainbow barrier had formed above the earthfire pit, an identical formation had appeared around Han Li, trapping him inside. Were it not for the absence of flame inside Han Li's barrier, he would've entirely suspected that he was also a material to be refined.

Han Li had grown even more uneasy upon seeing that he was still left alone after so long. But at that moment, a change had suddenly occurred. With a flash of light, the light barrier began to pulsate.

Han Li narrowed his eyes for a moment before recovering his indifferent expression. Before he could even guess what had happened, he suddenly felt something amiss from his body. He couldn't help but fearfully lower his head.

As the rainbow light barrier around him pulsed, he saw faint wisps of azure light visibly leaving his body. Although it was quite slow, his spiritual power was undoubtedly being drained from his body and into the light barrier.

Han Li frowned with a sullen expression. It seemed the three demons had no plans of having him meddle with the treasure refinement. As such, he was only being treated as a huge spirit

stone.

But after some further thought, his expression returned to normal, and he inwardly sneered.

He didn't believe that the three demons would hold him there forever. He reckoned that they would have him assist them sooner or later.

Chapter 548: Combining Wind and Lightning

Although Han Li had anticipated that the treasure refinement wouldn't merely take a few days, he was quite shocked to find that the three demon cultivators sat cross-legged in complete stillness for five entire months while refining the bizarre material with their core flames.

During this period, apart from stopping four times to recover their magic power, they had kept their demon cores suspended in the air, continuously spouting out core flames in a leisurely manner. Their statuses as grade eight and nine demon beasts clearly weren't just for show. Their magic power was truly profound.

Because Han Li was refining Qi the entire time, he had managed to preserve his full state of magic power. The miniscule amount of magic power that the light barrier consumed could hardly be considered significant.

The wing bones within the core flames had become increasingly translucent and bright with each passing day. It also faintly carried the sounds of thunder and sharp wind. The joy in Feng Xi's eyes became more obvious as this occurred. Han Li knew that the finalization of the Thunderstorm Wings was approaching.

In those several months, Han Li was puzzled to find that not a single trace of the malicious Qi could be found from within his body. However, after some further thought, he felt that it had something to do with the Divine Devilbane Lightning in his body. They had a miraculous efficacy against things of evil nature.

'Could it be the the malicious Qi had already been exterminated by the Divine Devilbane Lightning?' Han Li felt delight at the thought.

Had the malicious Qi truly appeared, he had planned on using the Divine Devilbane Lightning to get rid of it, or to take the risk of swallowing some Gold Devouring Beetles and having them forcefully consume it.

As a result, the Windbreaker Beast's method of coercion was unable to inspire any fear in Han Li, not that he had taken it seriously to begin with. The old demon definitely wouldn't have expected for Han Li to possess such an astonishingly valuable magic treasure with his low cultivation.

Without any worry of this later harming him, Han Li became even more resolved to resist. He quickly swept through the many plans he had previously made to escape. He was prepared to use the most optimal plan according to how the situation played out.

After yet another month, Feng Xi rose from his seat and began to take action as if he felt that the refinement was about to be done.

From the moment he opened his eyes, he stared at the bone wings in the air that were on the verge of completion. With a deep sigh, he suddenly shot a dozen incantation seals at it and suddenly extinguished his core flame, revealing the three demon cores and two bone wings that were within.

The demon cores were comparatively dimmer than before. It seemed the persist strain of the demon cores over the months of use had harmed their origin Qi. Contrarily, the bone wings had become slender and whole, emitting a milky white luster that was nearly blinding.

Without any hesitation, Feng Xi flicked his own demon core, causing it to wildly rotate around in the air before returning down his throat. The other two demons glanced at each other before doing the same. Wordlessly, the three demons began to immediately meditate and rest. Several days later, the three demon cultivators had replenished their magic power and origin Qi.

At that moment, Feng Xi turned his gaze to Han Li. He shot an

incantation seal at the light barrier entrapping him. Red radiance bored into the light barrier, causing it to dissolve with several violent flashes.

Han Li possessed an entirely tranquil expression that was void of any surprise.

Feng Xi's expression grew relaxed and he said, "Next, we will be joining the two wings as one and merge lightning and wind together. We will require Fellow Daoist's wood attribute magic power to act as a balance. Get yourself prepared!"

"Understood!" Without saying anything further, Han Li stood up.

When Feng Xi saw Han Li's expression, he frowned and hesitation flickered within his eyes.

He lowered his head and muttered to himself for a moment before suddenly flicking his finger without warning. A streak of white radiance shot straight towards Han Li!

Han Li's expression grew aghast, but after a moment of hesitation, he didn't move out of the way. With the white radiance entering his body, Han Li wore an unsightly expression. Han Li pursed his lips and sullenly said, "Senior Feng, what is the meaning of this?"

"Be at ease, the wind spirit energy will not harm you, and will disappear after a short amount of time. But during this time, if I were to trigger it with a slight bit of magic power, Fellow Daoist is as good as dead. Do your best, and don't think about anything else." Feng Xi sinisterly said.

Han Li inwardly grumbled upon hearing that. Over half of his plans to escape had just been eliminated.

Feng Xi was quite pleased to see Han Li's angry expression. Without paying further attention to Han Li, he took out three medicine bottles from his storage pouch. Afterwards, he tossed

two of them to the other demons.

Feng Xi solemnly exhorted, “Little Brothers, be careful. Combining wind and lightning spiritual power will be very taxing on our magic power. These bottles each has a drop of Myriad Year Spirit Milk. Use it when your magic power is exhausted. The merging process must go smoothly. Otherwise, the Thunderstorm Wings will never come into being.”

A trace of amazement flickered within the flood dragon’s eyes when he heard that the bottles contained Myriad Year Spirit Milk. He soon agreed, “Please, be at ease. I will certainly spare no effort.”

The demon tortoise to his side slapped his chest and pledged, “As will I! I also wish to see what profound abilities the Thunderstorm Wings will display upon completion!”

Feng Xi wore a satisfied expression after hearing their responses. He then wordlessly rubbed his hands together before holding them out and shooting a bowl-thick beam of white light towards the rainbow light barrier. The light barrier trembled and released a low hum for a moment. Afterwards, it flickered and continuously shifted colors until it shined with a blinding white radiance.

When the flood dragon and demon tortoise saw this, they rushed to shoot out their own blue and yellow beams of light at the barrier. Halfway to the barrier, the beams of light converged to turn into a white beam of lightning spiritual energy before then striking the barrier.

In an instant, the light rumbled and the light barrier underwent another change. Rolls of thunder began to sound from within the barrier as it pulsed with a silver radiance.

Upon seeing the barrier flicker, Feng Xi unhesitantly ordered Han Li with a deep, icy tone, “Fellow Daoist Li, pour in a tenth of your cultivation’s spiritual power.”

Han Li hesitated for a moment and his expression stirred. Feng Xi

could definitely end him from controlling the wind spiritual energy inside his body. He could only raise his hand and shoot a finger-thick beam of azure light into the barrier.

A strange scene occurred!

The instability and hums released from the light barrier were instantly reduced. The brilliance had also dimmed and became slightly more stable.

Feng Xi's expression relaxed and he excitedly said, "Good, continue to supply the spiritual power!" It appeared that his plan to combine wind and lightning energy was coming into fruition.

When the other two demons saw this, their confidence greatly increased.

They started to form many various complicated incantation gestures, and strike countless spell seals against the light barrier.

After a short moment, the light barrier began to reveal a furious white gale contained within it along with bolts of silver lightning. The lightning and wind energy wrapped closely together around the bone wings and started to merge. Feng Xi then called for Han Li to pour in further wood attribute spiritual power as he gazed into the light barrier.

In the following week, huge bolts of silver lightning and furious white gales rampaged within the barrier.

The three demons grew tense and continuously struck the light barrier with their incantation seals. Feng Xi appeared particularly intense.

As Han Li watched them from the side, he continued to pour his wood-attribute spiritual energy into the barrier under their orders. However, a trace of a strange, excited expression flickered within his eyes, but in the end, Han Li decided against taking any rash actions. He felt the opportunity had yet to arrive.

Three three demons couldn't conceal their fatigue. Although

their incantation seals didn't cease, their magic power was definitely on the point of exhaustion.

Although the violent storm of lightning and wind inside the light barrier was intense, a strange union began to form. The violent winds began to flicker with sparks and the lightning began to carry cries of the wind.

The three demons wore unconcealed joy upon seeing this.

On the next day, the demon tortoise had exhausted his magic power and took the drop of spirit milk. In the following days, the flood dragon and Feng Xi followed suit.

Han Li expressionlessly looked at this and gripped the storage pouch in his hands. His eyes contained a difficult to perceive trace of slyness.

When the three demon beasts' magic power had been exhausted and the magic treasure had yet to be fully refined, that would be his moment to act.

Han Li had originally thought this plan to be unreliable. But under the current circumstances, it had become somewhat feasible.

Chapter 549: Intrigue

After another twenty days passed, the interior of the barrier had become tranquil. The violent storm had disappeared to reveal a pair of silver white wings. The missing flesh around the Lightning Roc bones had been replaced with precious materials, and the feathers were replaced with lightning and wind.

With this, the pair of wind and lightning wings had taken form.

Although the wings currently appeared completed, it truth, the feathers' wind-lightning power had only just taken form and had yet to stabilize. As a result, the clearly exhausted Feng Xi had forced himself to pour even more magic power into the barrier, fearing that their previous efforts would go to waste.

Feng Xi felt quite gloomy as he did this. He had originally believed that the three drops of spirit milk that he had specially acquired for them would be sufficient. But he didn't expect that their spiritual power would be depleted while just on the verge of the wing's completion. Fortunately, under the current circumstances he could choose to damage his Origin Qi and forcefully support it until the end. Otherwise, the magic treasure would be lost forever and he would be inflicted with incurable regret.

But during that moment, the grade nine demon beast suddenly felt a strange fluctuation of Qi inside the room. Although it was very weak and only occurred for a short time, it was extremely pure.

He swept his gaze across the room with narrowed eyes, eventually arriving upon Han Li; Feng Xi's face turned sullen.

Han Li revealed shock, but he immediately forced a smile. However, Feng Xi continued to coldly gaze upon him without emotion.

“Take it out!” The demon cultivator ordered.

“What does Senior want?” Han Li’s expression grew increasingly strained and artificial as he quietly withdrew his hand from his sleeve.

A cold glint flickered from Feng Xi’s eyes. He wordlessly pointed at Han Li, shooting a ball of dazzling, pulsing white light towards Han Li.

Han Li was initially stunned before he immediately released a miserable scream. He fell to the floor and thrashed about with an agonized expression as his complexion turned purple.

“Humph! If you won’t listen to words, then listen to force!” A hostile gaze flashed across Feng Xi’s face as he gazed at the small bottle that fell out of Han Li’s sleeve. With a strange expression he grabbed toward the small bottle and had it fly to his hand.”

Feng Xi glared at Han Li and bluntly said, “Is the flare of wind spirit energy unpleasant? You had consumed quite a bit of spiritual energy recently, but you’ve recovered quite a bit of it. It seems the bottle should hold some spiritual medicine. Did Fellow Daoist Li plan on taking advantage of our deprived state to flee by using his recovered spiritual energy?”

After the demon cultivator ceased his technique, Han Li was barely able to stand back up. His face paled as if his scheme had been exposed.

Feng Xi glanced at the small bottle “Why, aren’t you clever? Let’s see what is in the bottle. I’ve never heard of something besides from Myriad Spirit Milk that is able to recover spiritual power in an instant.”

The flood dragon curiously said, “I’ve also never heard of such a thing. However, it has come at a useful time.”

At that moment, the demon tortoise and flood dragon were striking the barrier with incantation seals and accelerating the

fusion process between the lightning and wind. Although it seemed that the demon tortoise was doing slightly better than the flood dragon, his magic power was also heavily depleted and he was barely able to persist.

Feng Xi opened the bottle with a thumping heart, catching a whiff of pure spirit Qi.

He glanced at the bottle before bringing it to his nose and taking a sniff.

The demon tortoise was unable to keep calm and closely questioned, "What is it?"

Feng Xi glared at Han Li and coldly said, "Speak!"

Han Li crestfallenly hung his head and reluctantly said, "It is a flask of diluted Myriad Year Spirit Milk."

When the demon tortoise heard him, his spirit trembled with surprised delight, "What? You also have Myriad Year Spirit Milk?"

As the three demons didn't believe that their magic power could persist until the end, they were greatly overjoyed.

"Humph, it's green. It seems you mixed something else within it too. And it has heavy wood spiritual Qi." Feng Xi examined the small bottle with suspicion.

Han Li bitterly smiled and sincerely answered, "I mixed a few aged spiritual medicines within it. Because I practice a wood-attribute cultivation art, wood-attribute spiritual Qi would naturally be of great benefit to me."

Feng Xi frowned and thought to ask more when the demon tortoise loudly yelled, "Brother Feng, quickly pass the spirit milk over and let me drink it. I know that although we will be able to persist with great difficulty, we will overdraft our Origin Qi and cause our cultivation to decline. I need to replenish my spiritual Qi." The demon tortoise feared that Feng Xi wouldn't agree and grew anxious.

Feng Xi hesitantly responded, “Of course I know that, but this spirit milk...”

After a moment of silence, the flood dragon said, “Brother Feng! I can sense the pure spiritual Qi from so far away. It is Myriad Spirit Milk without a doubt. Even if the spirit milk was sabotaged, what harm will it do to us? Moreover, I am a Venomous Flood Dragon, a devourer of all poisons. Even if the bottle is poisoned, it will have no effect against me.”

It appeared they both didn’t wish to squander their Origin Qi.

“Hehe! I had nearly forgotten about Brother Wu’s innate poison ability. Since this is the case, let us split the spirit milk into three. This way, we won’t suffer much damage to our true essence after we complete the refinement.” Feng Xi silently smiled and stretched his neck back, pouring a third of the spirit milk down his throat. He then tossed the bottle to the Venomous Flood Dragon with a chuckle.

As a grade nine demon beast, he had no fear of any poison, and since the spiritual Qi was genuine, he had no thoughts of letting it go.

The flood dragon caught the small bottle and drank half of what was left in the bottle before handing it off to the demon tortoise.

The demon tortoise then impatiently gulped the rest of the spirit milk and flung the small bottle to the side.

Not long after, the three felt some of their magic power recover, and they let out a breath of relief. Feng Xi no longer held any of his original suspicions in mind.

At that moment, a cold glint flickered in the flood dragon’s eyes as he sent Feng Xi a voice transmission, “When we’re done refining the treasure, the human cultivator will no longer have a use. Let me finish him off. The human makes for an irksome presence!” When the flood dragon finished speaking, he coldly swept his gaze

over Han Li and displayed harsh killing intent.

Feng Xi unconsciously turned his gaze to Han Li and indifferently said, “Don’t get rid of him for the time being. Although we won’t need his wood-attribute spiritual Qi in the following days, it is better to be careful. You can kill him after the wings have finished.”

“Fine, then the human will have a few more days to live!” The flood dragon’s tone was unsatisfied, but he decided to agree to wait in the end.

Han Li had only seen their lips move and was unable to know what they said. However, his body broke into a chill when their hostile gazes fell upon him and he could faintly guess what they were talking about.

His face grew unsightly after some thought and he wordlessly sat down cross-legged on the floor. He then slowly closed his eyes as if he were resigned to death.

The three demons paused after seeing this, but they paid no more attention to Han Li and completely focused their attention on the spirit wings.

In truth, Han Li’s heart was heavily thumping at that moment. He was slowly transferring slivers of faint gold lightning from his Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords into his body, controlling it so it wouldn’t erupt. Afterwards, layers of Divine Devilbane Lightning began to densely coil around the ball of wind spirit energy that Feng Xi had planted within him.

The Wind Spirit Energy wasn’t something that Han Li could refine at his current cultivation, and it wasn’t something that the Devilbane lightning could cleanly dissolve. However, he could restrain it for the time being and prevent it from flaring out, drawing from his experience in binding the Celestial Ice Pearl.

At that moment, the demon tortoise had recovered a portion of

his spiritual power. Just as he effortlessly continued to pour spiritual power into the light barrier, he glanced at the flood dragon and suddenly thought of something. He thought to say something, but his mouth suddenly trembled and his expression twisted. With an odd gaze in his eyes, the demon tortoise ceased sending spiritual power into the light barrier and fell to the ground. His mouth was wide open, but not the slightest sound was produced.

An astonishing scene followed. The demon's abdomen had suddenly expanded.

In the following moment, his head and limbs also began to swell with protrusions as if evil spirits had suddenly emerged from within his body and wished to break free.

When the flood dragon and Feng Xi saw this, their expressions greatly changed and they simultaneously recalled the diluted spirit milk from Han Li's small bottle.

Chapter 550: Helplessness in a Crisis

The Venomous Flood Dragon bellowed and his body flourished with scarlet light as he thought to immediately attack Han Li. But at nearly the same time, the demon's face immediately grimaced and he fell to his knees with a bang. He helplessly stared at the swelling in his body and remained still in his powerlessness.

“You’re courting death!” Feng Xi furiously yelled. A flash of white light flickered from his face; his body then disappearing from sight. A moment later, he appeared behind Han Li, and fiercely swiped down with a black claw.

His movements were near instantaneous. Although Han Li had already prepared himself, he still wasn’t able to keep up with his movements. He could only do his utmost to throw his body to the side.

Clang! Han Li was pushed away by a huge force and was thrown over thirty meters away. Han Li then stood back up with obvious difficulty.

The single strike of the grade nine demon beast’s claw wasn’t able to immediately kill Han Li. The demon cultivator couldn’t help but pause, an ominous glint soon flickering across his eyes as he stared at where he had struck Han Li. The tears in his clothes revealed silver white scales. A majority of them were shattered from the strike, revealing a twinkling, jet-black cloth underneath.

“Inner armor?” Feng Xi was greatly surprised, but he soon scoffed and wordlessly turned into wind once more, disappearing without a trace.

The inner armor was clearly an extremely fine treasure for it to be able to withstand one of his strikes. However, the armor wouldn’t be able to save his life a second time.

Han Li also recognized his previous survival to only be a result of

luck. He was sure that strike should've been able to kill him. Man Huzi's Royal Scale Plate was truly an extraordinary treasure to be able to ward off a strike from a grade nine demon beast.

With the precious time the armor had bought, Han Li firmly regained his footing. Golden lightning surged throughout his body without the slightest thought, accompanied by a blinding flourish of azure light that took the form of a huge azure essence swordshield. He also raised his arms and summoned twenty-four azure swords from within his body, instantly forming a barrier around him.

Just as Han Li finished doing this, Feng Xi's tall stature appeared in front of Han Li yet again. With a sinister glare, he opened his mouth and revealed a blinding white light.

Han Li's expression abruptly changed as he inwardly cursed in helplessness. He was fundamentally incapable of surviving if the old demon was going to use his demon core in a direct attack.

As Han Li felt his heart freeze, Feng Xi suddenly closed his mouth and his body swayed. His face wore an unsightly expression as he lost his footing.

Han Li was immediately roused from his shock, noticing that the demon cultivator had started to tremble. Moreover, his abdomen began to show protrusions. Although this old demon had a much deeper cultivation than the other two, the effects of the green liquid had eventually taken hold.

Han Li was overjoyed and pointed at him without the slightest hesitation. The twenty-four Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords surged towards Feng Xi and began to wildly strike at him from every angle.

After only a short moment, Han Li's smile grew rigid.

Although the Windbreaker Beast was painfully on his knees and his hands were tightly gripping his abdomen, he had managed to

envelop his body in a layer of faint white light. The flying swords alone weren't able to break through the light barrier in even the slightest. Additionally, the demon cultivator was still able to force his head up to fiercely glare at Han Li. Although he couldn't speak, his eyes were full of malice.

With a single glance, Han Li felt his heart drop. Pondering for a short moment, Han Li concluded there should be some sort of treasure protecting Feng Xi. Otherwise, he definitely would've been able to slay Han Li with even the slightest control over his magic power, given his immense hatred for Han Li.

Han Li's heart grew calm at the thought and he quickly formed an incantation gesture with his hands. The flying swords merged together, forming two balls of blinding azure lights. The two balls of light faded away to reveal two azure swords about ten meters long; they glowed with an imposingly cold light.

With a strange expression flickering within his eyes, Han Li silently opened his mouth and spouted a cloud of azure Qi onto each sword, causing them to flourish with splendor. With a series of light hums, they then chopped down towards the Windbreaker Beast.

The huge swords fiercely struck the white light with a bang. Azure and white light intertwined, but in the end, the two swords were only able to cut several inches into the white light before they were forcefully repelled.

Han Li blankly stared at the scene, but Feng Xi wore a trace of a sneer.

Han Li couldn't help but tremble upon seeing his expression. Although Feng Xi was crippled, Han Li had no method of harming him. Apart from the throbbing in Feng Xi's swollen abdomen, there wasn't much of a change to his limbs or head. The demon cultivator seemed to be forcefully suppressing the effects of the green liquid.

Han Li's expression changed as he suddenly thought of something. He hastily turned his gaze to the other demons and felt his heart tremble.

The flood dragon and demon tortoise still had inflated bodies. However, their heads and limbs had started to shrink. It appeared that their bodies were releasing the spiritual Qi without restraint. It was clear that they were suppressing the green liquid, but at a much slower rate than the Windbreaker Beast due to their lower cultivation.

Han Li instantly pointed to the two huge swords, causing them to strike the two demons as streaks of azure light. Since the swords couldn't deal with the Windbreaker Beast, it would be better to first deal with the other two demons!

Afterwards, Han Li steeled his mind and slapped the spirit beast pouch at his waist. Countless Gold Devouring Beetles filled the room. With a low-pitch whistle, Han Li directed them towards Feng Xi.

Feng Xi's eyes revealed astonishment upon seeing the beetles appear. In the following moment, the countless beetles enveloped the white light in layers and started gnawing at the white light.

At that moment, the two huge swords chopped down upon the demon tortoise and flood dragon. Although their eyes widened, they couldn't move in the slightest. They could only watch as the azure swords struck their body. Two violent clangs were produced from the strike, but not the slightest damage was done.

Han Li was left stunned by the result. "How could this be? The Windbreaker Beast has a treasure protecting his body that is able to block the flying swords. But these demons were able to repel the swords with their bodies alone without receiving even the slightest damage! How could the bodies of these grade eight demon beasts be so hard?"

Of course, Han Li wasn't about to give up after just this.

He pointed to the two huge swords and caused them to release arm-thick bolts of lightning onto the two demons.

The two demons appeared quite pained upon receiving the lightning, but they remained uninjured. However, their expressions only grew most hostile as a result. Presumably, their first thoughts after regaining control of their bodies would be to tear Han Li apart.

Han Li felt a slight pang of fear at the thought and then turned his head over to look at his Gold Devouring Beetles. After some thought, he had the Gold Devouring Beetles float into the air and reveal the demon cultivator underneath.

Although the white light had somewhat dimmed, the demon beast was still safe and sound underneath the white light. It was truly proving difficult for Han Li to deal with. Even after the simultaneous feasting of tens of thousands of Gold Devouring Beetles, they had only managed to slightly weaken it. The power of Feng Xi's protective treasure was truly beyond reason.

Just as Han Li hesitated on whether he wanted the Gold Devouring Beetles to continue swarming around Feng Xi, Feng Xi regained the ability to speak.

The demon wore a vicious expression as he strenuously spoke, "Human! Do you believe that a trifling Core Formation cultivator is somehow capable of dealing with metamorphosis stage demons? In a moment, we will give you a taste of what it means to desire death." Although his tone was calm, his words were staunch and threatening.

When Han Li heard those words, he regained clarity of mind. "Humph! Is that so?"

Without further hesitation, he pointed to the Gold Devouring Beetles in the air, causing them to change direction towards the other two demons with a ferocious buzz.

The two huge swords then made their way towards the rainbow light barrier.

Fenx Xi saw Han Li's actions and started to panic. He hurriedly yelled at him with a fearful expression, "Stop! What folly are you up to? Do you wish to be pursued by all the flood dragons in these seas? And the Thunderstorm Wings have yet to be completed. If you take them out now all will be lost. Furthermore, those spirit wings can only be controlled using both spirit and lightning power. What use is there in you taking it?"

Han Li sneered and showed no sign of stopping. The insect swarms fell upon the two demons in an instant, and the two huge swords' strikes had nearly collapsed the rainbow refinement barrier. After all, the barrier's purpose was to refine magic tools; it wasn't made with defensive capabilities in mind.

Feng Xi's green eyes grew crimson upon see this, but the strange ailment that affected his body continued to prevent him from taking any action.

In the following moment, the Venomous Flood dragon released a heaven-shaking screech.

Scarlet bloodlight ruptured from within the beetles. Upon touching the bloodlight, the beetles immediately turned into drops of black liquid and released yellow smoke.

The scarlet mist was amazingly toxic.

Chapter 551: Devouring the Flood Dragon

Han Li squinted while gazing at the scene through the red mist.

The Venomous Flood Dragon's scales had been torn away under the onslaught of the Gold Devouring Beetles. However, the shredded skin and flesh underneath spouted out a seemingly endless mist of bloodlight, melting large quantities of the beetles into a black liquid. Not long after, the many beetles that had surrounded the flood dragon had nearly all perished.

As of current, the mutilated body of the Venomous Flood Dragon was oozing green blood from all over. He stared at Han Li with a bone-deep hatred.

Han Li's heart trembled. It appeared that the Venomous Flood Dragon's reputation wasn't undeserved. His Gold Devouring Beetles had already evolved to a point where ordinary magic treasures could hardly pose a threat to them. It was obvious how deadly the mist of toxic bloodlight was from how easily the beetles had been exterminated.

Soon, a sneer reappeared on Han Li's face. The demons had no idea just how many beetles he possessed. Even if he had to expend most of them, he would definitely slay each and every one of them.

With that thought, he took a quick look at the swarm of beetles that were covering the demon tortoise. He heard the incessant sound of grating from their direction, but the insect swarm appeared to be nearly motionless. If it weren't for the faint demonic Qi that leaked out from the beetles, Han Li would've dared to believe that the demon was already dead.

Although he felt uncertainty swell in his heart, Han Li raised his arms into the air without any further thought and tossed several spirit beast pouches out. Suddenly, a huge hum of insect wings reverberated throughout the room as over a hundred thousand black-tainted Gold Devouring Beetles appeared.

Upon seeing such a large quantity of beetles, the flood dragon revealed an expression of despair.

At that same moment, Feng Xi's expression abruptly changed to reveal astonishment.

It was said that exotic spirit insects had a far shorter lifespan than common spirit beasts. Although their incubation period was quite short and they laid hundred of eggs when breeding, they would ordinarily only breed once every hundred years. After hatching and accepting a master, they would need several tens of years of training and nurturing before they could be truly used. Additionally, the greater the power and the higher the grade of the insects, the more time was required. As a result, only a few cultivators were renowned for their insect control techniques in the Scattered Star Seas despite the numerous cultivators that practiced such techniques. They were especially rare to find past Core Formation stage!

Most insect controllers would only possess about a thousand exotic insects in their lifetime if they were lucky. In most of these cases, they had inherited a majority of their insects from a master in order to acquire such an amount.

Additionally, exotic insects were said to be far weaker than spirit beasts. It wasn't uncommon to see an entire swarm of insects be exterminated in a single battle. As a result, there were few cultivators that used insect control techniques despite knowing that their powers were great.

As a result, Feng Xi and the flood dragon were in disbelief after seeing Han Li release such a vast quantity of insects. Despite being metamorphosis stage demon beasts, they still felt fear at the ferocity of Han Li's beetles.

Of course, if they knew that this might was coming from insects that had yet to fully mature, they would be left in even greater shock.

Without paying any further attention to the hate, fury, and fear in the flood dragon's eyes, Han Li quickly uttered an incantation and had the flying insects separate into several groups before sending them off to maul the flood dragon.

A mist of bloodlight spurted forth once more from the flood dragon's wounds, and liquified any Gold Devouring Beetles that it touched. However, the beetles swarming around the ceiling of the room held no fear. After a short moment, the mist of bloodlight shrank and dimmed, eventually disappearing to reveal the flood dragon's wretched expression.

Han Li's eyes brightened as he saw this and had another group of beetles immediately fall upon flood dragon, drowning him once more in a sea of gold, silver and black. This pattern repeated over and over: the swarm would be melted by the toxic bloodlight only to be replaced by yet another swarm after it faded away. Eventually, the Venomous Flood Dragon could no longer endure, succumbing to the repeated swarms of Gold Devouring Beetles.

When Feng Xi saw this, his expression faintly changed, but he immediately wore a face of calm. He merely stared at Han Li with an icy gaze.

Han Li snorted and had the insect swarm depart from the body, revealing the remains of the Venomous Flood Dragon. A sparkling fist-sized, blood-red core could be seen within.

A strange emotion flickered from his eyes, but before he took any action, the demon core took off into the air with a flash of blue light, heading in the direction of the room's exit. Han Li instantly reached and shot an azure swordstreak from his hand.

The demon core wobbled through the air from the strike before an inch-long miniature flood dragon suddenly emerged from within the demon core in a flash of blue light. It was the flood dragon's primal soul.

When the flood dragon's soul saw that it had been revealed, it

panickedly disappeared with a flash of scarlet light.

A chilling glint flickered from Han Li's eyes. He slapped a spirit beast pouch at his waist, summoning a yellow streak of light. When it fell onto the floor, a small, gloomy monkey with a lazy appearance appeared. It was the Weeping Soul Beast.

Han Li didn't have the time to worry about the beast's mood and slapped its head, causing the Weeping Soul Beast to involuntarily snort and shoot a yellow light out from its nose. The yellow light spiralled through the air before eventually enveloping an empty area. With a flash of yellow light, the miniature flood dragon's soul appeared.

Soon after, the yellow light wrapped around the the flood dragon's soul and dragged it back into the Weeping Soul Beast's nose.

The flood dragon's soul was naturally unwilling to face death and stopped itself halfway by releasing a blinding blue light. The blue light stopped the yellow mist in its entirety.

With a soul that powerful, it was worthy of belonging to a desolate beast at the metamorphosis stage. It was far more capable than any grade seven demon beast. Of course, this was also partially due to the Weeping Soul Beast's young age. Otherwise, it would've fully displayed power for which it was famed.

Han Li never intended for the Weeping Soul Beast to truly suck in the flood dragon's soul. Grade eight demon beast souls were an extremely precious material, and he naturally wasn't going to waste it.

As a result, while the Weeping Soul Beast and the flood dragon's soul were locked in confrontation, Han Li disappeared with a blur. He reappeared a moment later next to the flood dragon's soul with his hand covered in sparkling azure light. Unable to escape, the soul entered Han Li's tight grasp.

The soul was only several inches long, but it managed to forcefully sway his hand in its struggles. However, Han Li had already prepared a jade bottle in his other hand. In a single, quick movement, Han Li enveloped the flood dragon in azure light and slipped it into the bottle. He quickly covered the bottle and carefully placed it into his storage pouch. At that moment, he finally let out a breath of relief.

Han Li then turned around to face the demon tortoise, possessing not the slightest intention to delay it's death.

But at that moment, a brittle crack sounded out. The light barrier was finally broken through by the two huge swords. Without turning his head, he opened his hand and shot a wide cloud of azure light from his palm. A moment later, the light brought back the Thunderstorm Wings and dropped them into his hand. Since he couldn't deal with them at the time being, he stuffed them into his storage pouch for later.

This action caused Feng Xi to nearly spit out a mouthful of blood. His originally calm expression was now brimming with hatred.

Han Li's gaze fell upon the mound of beetles lying on another part of the room. He let out a low whistle, and the beetles flew off, revealing the demon tortoise underneath.

Han Li felt his breath turn cold.

The demon tortoise's body was shredded and mangled, but his body was enveloped in a faint yellow light. His bare flesh was squirming before Han Li's eyes and was healing at an amazing rate. In an instant, a majority of the wounds had already healed.

Wearing a stupefied expression, Han Li bitterly yelled, "A self-mending body!"

Self-mending bodies were quite common amongst demon beasts, and there were many low-grade demon beasts that possessed one. It would allow for quick recovery from wounds and for severed

limbs to regrow. However, this instinctual trait was rare amongst high grade demon beasts. Despite having killed so many grade six and seven demon beasts, Han Li had never seen an ability of near rebirth such as this.

Han Li was immensely shocked to discover that this grade eight demon tortoise actually possessed such a trait.

But with this, Han Li's problems had grown much larger. Apart from somehow slicing open the demon tortoise's head and shattering its demon core, Han Li had no other methods to kill it. Unless he could somehow exhaust his regenerative abilities, he was helpless.

Unfortunately, he had only refined his Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords several tens of years ago, and he had scarcely spent any of that time tempering them. As a result, they couldn't be considered powerful amongst magic treasures of cultivators at a similar grade, despite being made out of the legendary Golden Lightning Bamboo and being refined with the exceedingly precious crystal.

In the past, he had mostly relied on the magic treasure's quantity and astonishing coordination to slay grade six and seven demon beasts. Of course, while its power was immensely strengthened when a set of twelve combined together into a huge sword, this was merely one of the beneficial aspects of a set of magic treasure.

But even with the huge sword fusion, it was clear that he was incapable of defeating either of the present demon beast's long cultivated bodies.

Chapter 552: Escaping Pursuit

Han Li was extremely vexed when his swords proved completely harmless to the demon cultivators. But after some thought, he regained his calm.

A vast majority of high grade demon beasts specialized in cultivating their bodies. Their dense flesh and hardened skin could rival the magic treasures of similarly ranked cultivators. Furthermore, demon beasts had lifespans that lasted several times longer than common cultivators, sometimes possessing lifespans that were tens of times longer. As a result, the higher grade the demon beast, and the longer they cultivated, the more astonishingly durable their body would be.

Before arriving at Nascent Soul stage, cultivators relied on their magic treasures and knowledge to slay demon beasts of grade seven and under. But once demon beasts reached the metamorphosis stage at grade eight, they would often suppress human cultivators of the same rank with their cultivated bodies and expanded intellect.

Since flood dragons were a primordial race, their grade eight demons were comparable in both combat and defensive power to common grade nine demon beasts. As for demon tortoises, their race had the strongest defensive powers amongst all demon beasts.

After taking this into consideration, it wasn't any surprise that Han Li's flying swords were unable to harm them in the slightest. Though it may have gone differently if a Nascent Soul eccentric attacked them with a magic treasure that had been nurtured for several hundred years.

Conversely, were it a common Nascent Soul eccentric lying on the ground, Han Li would've easily been able to slay him. Very few cultivators refined their bodies like demons did; Man Huzi being a particularly notable exception.

As for the Divine Devilbane Lightning, while it may hold fatal power against devilish arts and evil techniques, it wasn't particularly effective against the demon race. The formidable might of the Divine Devilbane Lightning originated from the Gold Lightning Bamboo itself, but at Han Li's current cultivation, he was only able to tap into about a tenth of its power.

With this now clear in his mind, Han Li didn't feel dejected in the least. He understood that once he reached Nascent Soul stage and spent another hundred years tempering his Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords, his magic treasures would experience an enormous breakthrough in strength. At that point, he would be able to break through the demon beasts' defenses with relative ease.

After all, the Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were a peak grade magic treasure that he had spent an enormous amount of effort on to acquire. As such, Han Li believed they held immense potential.

Although Han Li could easily slay grade seven demon beasts and late Core Formation cultivators like himself, he didn't dare to fight Nascent Soul cultivators or grade eight demon beasts. There was a huge divide between the Core Formation and Nascent Soul stages; they were in entirely different worlds!

All of these thoughts flashed through Han Li's mind in a mere instant. When he took another glance at the demon tortoise and Feng Xi, his expression wavered and he revealed a deluge of emotion.

He came to the conclusion that unless he took the risk and used the Celestial Ice Pearl, he would have no other method of exterminating the two demon beasts in a short amount of time. Even with this, Han Li suspected that while he would be able to finish off the demon tortoise, he would likely prove incapable of breaking through the protective treasure of the Windbreaker Beast. Since he couldn't control the Celestial Ice Pearl, he wouldn't be able to focus its power onto the demons' bodies, greatly weakening the efficacy of the ice flame's strength.

But what especially made Han Li hesitate, was that the ice flames couldn't be recovered once used. If he wasn't able to kill Feng Xi after using them, he would be leaving the flames in the room as a parting gift for Feng Xi to make use of. In this situation, it would be better for Han Li to just leave the flames for himself! He could refine the pearl after condensing a Nascent Soul and have it become another deadly weapon in his arsenal.

Han Li spent very little time in thought as he couldn't afford to waste a single moment.

While the demon tortoise was still very much swollen, the Windbreaker Beast's abdomen had already greatly shrunk. Feng Xi's dark expression was becoming more hostile by the moment.

Han Li wouldn't have much longer before Feng Xi fully suppressed the green liquid's medicinal power and regained control over his body and magic power.

As a result, Han Li gritted his teeth and snatched the demon tortoise's storage pouch before sending him off with a kick into the pit of rampant earthfire. Soon after, he fished out another storage pouch from within the remains of the flood dragon and disappeared with a blur. When he reappeared at the side of the Windbreaker Beast, he quickly sent him flying off into the pit of earthfire to accompany the demon tortoise. Then without taking another look at the demons, he flew off as a streak of azure light.

Han Li didn't believe they would be able to track him down to whatever random island he chose to conceal himself on, no matter how profound and remarkable their abilities may be. Hence, Han Li struck a large hole through the room's stone door and flew off without a trace.

The tool refinement room became completely silent!

After an unknown amount of time, a resentful and vicious roar came from the room's earthfire pit. Following the roar, a streak of blinding white light flew out of the earthfire pit and broke through

the room's ceiling and then all of the cave residence's restrictions.

A moment later, the white light appeared above the small island and flew a circle around it at an imperceptible speed. After stopping in its original place, the light faded away to reveal Feng Xi.

From his neat appearance, it appeared that he had been left entirely unscathed by the earthfire. However, he was gritting his teeth in seething rage as he held the body of the still disabled demon tortoise in his hand.

The demon tortoise didn't have any treasures protecting its body, and as such its body was charred and smoking. It appeared to have suffered quite a bit in the earthfire pit.

Feng Xi's eyes glowed with white light as it swept its gaze past the horizon. After some thought, a malevolent expression appeared on his face. He then clutched his hand in an incantation gesture and white light flickered from his fingertip. A short moment later, his expression grew hostile.

After wordlessly confirming the direction, he tore through the skies in a streak of white light.

At that moment, Han Li broke into a cold sweat as he wildly flew through the skies. The wind spirit energy had begun to stir and the constraints of the Divine Devilbane Lightning had become unstable. Fortunately, Han Li quickly responded, hastily cutting his spirit power from the cloak and using it to forcefully suppress the changes.

After entering late Core Formation, Han Li was able to cut off the forceful extraction of his spiritual power from the cloak, despite still being unable to smoothly control it. This had greatly increased the usefulness of the ancient treasure.

Han Li bitterly grimaced. The Windbreaker Beast was coming for him. Han Li instinctively changed direction and wildly poured

spiritual power into his cloak before swiftly shooting off.

He had undoubtedly enraged Feng Xi, and if he were caught he would undoubtedly be chopped into pieces and have his soul refined.

Much to Han Li's vexation, Feng Xi was still able to control the wind spirit energy within his body despite being such a great distance away from him. This was a completely unanticipated variable. He now felt regret at having not released the Celestial Ice Pearl inside the tool refinement room when he had the chance.

But there was no point in thinking about that now. Han Li could only wildly escape with the aid of his blood-red cape. As Han Li continued with his escape, the wind spirit energy within his body would flare up once every four to six hours.

Although he managed to suppress it every time within a quarter of an hour, he still had to change the direction of his flight each time to prevent Feng Xi from determining his direction.

Han Li's speed was far inferior to that of the Windbreaker Beast, but he always managed to seize the initiative each time and throw him off by a large distance. However, Feng Xi was still able to relentlessly chase Han Li down by relying on the reaction of the wind spirit energy.

This game of cat and mouse continued for a month as they travelled across a huge expanse of the sea.

As the chase continued, Han Li felt increasingly more on edge and gloomy. In order to permanently escape from the Windbreaker Beast's pursuit, he wanted to refine the wind spirit energy within his body and rid himself of it for good. However, it was proving to be extremely durable. In the month he had been escaping, the wind spirit energy hadn't decreased in the slightest despite all of his efforts to refine it. It seemed it wasn't something a Core Formation cultivator could get rid of. Helpless, Han Li wholeheartedly continued his efforts to escape.

However, Han Li was extremely puzzled as to why the Windbreaker Beast didn't flare the wind spirit energy more often. Had he done this, the demon would've long since captured him.

Of course, Han Li couldn't have known that several thousands of kilometers away, Feng Xi constantly wanted to do just that. But much to his vexation, he found himself in the same position in Han Li.

Although the demon cultivator didn't know what strange poison had been placed inside the spirit milk, he would periodically have his spiritual power constrained and his body would begin to swell. Each time this happened he had no choice but to stop flying and forcefully suppress it.

Although he was sure that he could completely refine this poison after a period of meditation, he couldn't allow Han Li to escape from his pursuit. Moreover, Feng Xi didn't have much magic power left, so he had to do his utmost to pursue Han Li before he ran out!

As for the demon tortoise, he had long since recovered. But since he was too slow, Feng Xi had left him behind and continued on his own.

To his great annoyance, he was surprised to see that Han Li was able to travel so quickly. He faintly guessed that Han Li must've possess a magic treasure capable of such speeds.

Chapter 553: Lightning Movement

As day after day continued passed of the continued pursuit, the intervals at which the wind spirit energy flared grew increasingly further apart. At the start, it would trigger once every six hours which became once every twelve, and eventually, only once per day. Furthermore, the flares grew increasingly more weak each time. In the end, the wind spirit energy finally ceased flaring up altogether. It seemed the Windbreaker Beast had finally given up on the chase.

Han Li was naturally delighted. Regardless of whether the wind spirit energy had failed to activate due to the great distance or due to Feng Xi having ran into trouble, Han Li was finally given the opportunity to truly escape. Han Li took another drop of spirit liquid without any hesitation and identified his bearings before flying through the skies without worry.

On a small, desolate island several tens of thousands of kilometers away from Han Li, the Windbreaker Beast was sitting in an empty cave with an ashen expression. During the long, relentless pursuit, he had exhausted the entirety of his magic power and could no longer restrain the strange poison inside his body. As he had no method to instantly recovering his magic power, unlike Han Li with his Myriad Year Spirit Milk, Feng Xi could only helplessly stop on an island and spend some time to thoroughly rid himself of the poison afflicting him before continuing his pursuit of Han Li. Having expended so much of his time and effort on refining the Thunderstorm Wings, he was dead-set on getting them back.

The demon cultivator vowed to accomplish this with bone-burning hatred before closing his eyes and entering a meditative state of selflessness.

...

A month later, Han Li found himself at an unfamiliar, abandoned island.

Upon seeing that there were neither cultivators nor high grade demon beasts nearby, he descended onto the island and quickly carved out a crude stone cave.

After placing down several concealment spell formations, he hurriedly entered this cave and took out the Thunderstorm Wings.

Han Li glanced at the small, palm-sized wings in his palm with unconcealed delight.

Since the wings possessed both wind and lightning attributes and Feng Xi only possessed wind spirit power, the wings only required either lightning or wind to drive them. With the Divine Devilbane Lightning within his body, Han Li should be able to control the magic treasure. If they were as miraculous as the demon had said, then the sooner he could utilize them, the more likely his survival.

However, as Han Li examined the wings, he saw that the white feathers were faintly distorting.

Upon seeing this, Han Li immediately knew that this was because the treasure hadn't finished refining. Although they had been greatly weakened, they had managed to last this long despite Feng Xi's claims that all of their efforts would've been in vain.

Han Li didn't reveal the slightest alarm and calmly made a small cut on his fingertip. After a drop of blood essence gathered onto his fingertip, he clutched his hand in an incantation gesture and conducted the master recognition rites.

After dropping the blood essence onto the wings, a cold glint flashed from Han Li's eyes and he tossed the Thunderstorm Wings into the air. They then motionlessly floated.

Han Li held out his fingers towards them, shooting out slender arcs of lightning from his fingers onto the wings.

Han Li's face grew solemn as the arcs of lightning shot from his

hands with increasing density.

Not after, the Thunderstorm Wings became enveloped in a layer of golden lightning. Sounds of thunder echoed out from within the net of lightning.

Han Li felt relieved as he saw the Thunderstorm Wings slowly begin to absorb the lightning from the net of Divine Devilbane Lightning that surrounded them.

Over the following ten days, Han Li used the Divine Devilbane Lightning to gradually stabilize the wing's feathers. Additionally, because they absorbed the Divine Devilbane Lightning, their silver color was tinged with a faint gold. Unless one was carefully examining the wings, the gold tinge would be difficult to perceive.

Having finished the Thunderstorm Wings in place of the demon cultivators, Han Li ceased his lightning. He then spouted a mist of azure light onto the wings, and absorbed the wings into his body. Soon after, Han Li left the stone cave and flew off the small island, preparing to test both the Thunderstorm Wing's usability and miraculous capabilities.

Han Li took a deep breath as he floated high up in the sky. He then activated the Thunderstorm Wings that were contained inside his body. Puff, puff. He felt spiritual Qi swell within his back before a pair of meter long wings emerged from it. The wings were silver white with a slight tint of gold.

Han Li turned his head to look at them. When he thought to move them, the wings lightly waved without the slightest resistance as if nothing were there.

He curiously extended his hand to feel the wings, and was startled to discover that they had a rough texture.

Han Li frowned at this and put some strength into his hand, only for them to easily pass through the wings.

“This is...?” Han Li was shocked and immediately gazed within

himself.

The palm-sized Thunderstorm Wings were safely contained inside his Dantian and faintly shined with white light. The wings outside of his body weren't the treasure's true form but were instead a manifestation of spiritual power, much to Han Li's surprise.

After concentrating for a moment, Han Li started to pour magic power into the wings' true form, causing the exterior wings to flash with silver light. Then with a flap of the wings, Han Li easily sped through the air.

After flying several circles around the island, Han Li stopped and started to mutter to himself as he grasped his chin. Their speed wasn't particularly impressive. In fact, it wasn't much different from his ordinary speed. It seemed that he would have to pour either wind or lightning spiritual power into them to see their true capabilities.

With that thought, Han Li drove his divine lightning into the wings without hesitation, sending two sparks of faint golden lightning into the interior wings. In that same instant, lightning was released from the wings behind him. Han Li hastily turned his head around to see the wings flicker with silver lightning and unconsciously unfolded them. They now released a strange aura.

With a mental command, thunder rang as he reappeared thirty meters away in a flash of silver light.

“Lightning movement!”

Han Li blankly stared for a moment before being filled with ecstasy. Then with another flap of his wings, he reappeared a hundred meters away in the wake of more thunder.

In the following moments, Han Li transformed into a bolt of silver lightning, travelling three hundred meters away in an instant. His erratic and instantaneous movements were beyond

extraordinary.

After reappearing in an arc of silver lightning, Han Li joyously caressed the wings and muttered, “Lightning movement is worthy of being called the most profound of all movement techniques. It is incomparable to the common movement techniques of the five elements! Perhaps with even more tempering, this magic treasure could become even more incredible. It was no wonder Feng Xi expended so much time and effort in refining them. There are few things in the world that are capable of such speeds. With these wings, there would have been practically no one in this world capable of killing him.” Afterwards, the wings dissipated with a pulse of silver light.

Han Li didn’t plan on staying in the Outer Star Seas for long, as he wanted to return to the Inner Star Seas as soon as possible. Although he might’ve shaken off Feng Xi for the time being, with his fantastical speeds as a Windbreaker Beast, he would come chasing down Han Li from the nearby seas soon enough. Han Li had no intention of obediently waiting for the demon to come knocking on his door.

As the Inner Star Seas were under the dominion of humans, it was likely that regardless of how mighty of a demon he may be, he wouldn’t be able to follow too deeply. After Han Li had returned to the Inner Star Seas and condensed a Nascent Soul, he would no longer hold any fear of the demon.

As for the Heavenvoid Cauldron, those Nascent Soul eccentrics should’ve ceased their pursuit by now, given what had developed in the many years that has passed. Furthermore, after Han Li became a Nascent Soul cultivator, he should be able to flee from Zenith Yin and the others without problem, so long as he didn’t come across anyone as fearsome as Man Huzi.

With that thought, Han Li returned to the island’s cave and quickly examined the storage pouches of the demon tortoise and Venomous Flood Dragon. He unexpectedly found many demon

beast cores within them along with a few extremely precious materials.

Two particularly valuable material were a fist-sized, jet-black tortoise shell and a batch of over a hundred crimson scales. These should be parts that the two demons shed during metamorphosis. They were a delightful surprise, and could be refined into armor that was no less powerful than Man Huzi's Royal Scale Plate.

However, now was not the time to deal with these items. Instead, he retrieved the formations he had placed on the island and departed in the direction of the last known location of the Exquisite Sound Sect's hidden city.

He reckoned that the transportation formation should've already been constructed by the time he arrived. Regardless of whether he had to use coercion, bribes, or brute force, he planned to use the transportation formation and arrive at the Inner Seas.

Although Han Li didn't know the current location of where the Exquisite Sound Sect's hidden city was, he only had to find out from some well informed human cultivators.

But little did Han Li know, at that very moment, the demon tortoise had arrived at a cave over a kilometer deep in the seas. Here he informed a nearby flood dragon clan elder about the killing of the Venomous Flood Dragon. This particular elder was a mid stage, grade nine Inferno Flood Dragon.

Chapter 554: Rush to the Exquisite Sound Sect

At Han Li's current cultivation, even without using either the blood-red cloak or the Thunderstorm Wings, he was capable of flying at an astonishing speed. In less than half a month, Han Li arrived at the desolate island that had once been the location of the Exquisite Sound Sect's hidden city. After sweeping his spiritual sense across the island, he didn't find a single soul. It seemed he would have to search for humans elsewhere and acquire the information from them.

Han Li glanced around before casually choosing a direction, and disappearing in a streak of azure light.

Since the Exquisite Sound Sect had moved after establishing their city on this island, they shouldn't have moved far away. Additionally, the nearby seas should be an area where some of the surviving human cultivators have gathered. Han Li was confident that with his vast spiritual sense, he would be able to find some human cultivators without much effort. As expected, about half a day later, Han Li discovered traces of many human cultivators on a medium sized island.

Looking down from the sky, he saw many male and female cultivators being besieged by two grade four demon beasts from the nearby seas.

When Han Li spotted a few familiar faces among them, he faintly smiled.

Soon after, he used the appearance exchange art to assume the form of a dark-skinned, middle-aged man. He then casually launched two azure swordstreaks at the demon beasts with a wave of his hand. With a flash of light, a hole appeared through the heads of each of the demon beasts as they fell to the ground.

This sudden display had alarmed the many cultivators below, and they immediately turned their heads towards the sky to discover Han Li. An uproar arose among the cultivators at the appearance of the newly arrived expert.

After consulting amongst themselves, a large man with an embroidered robe eventually flew towards Han Li.

“Many thanks for Senior’s assistance. Is there anything that us Juniors may help you with?”

Although the large, embroidered-robed man spoke with a respectful tone, a trace of unease could be seen on his face. Just why did this Core Formation cultivator suddenly appear at this island?

Han Li didn’t immediately respond upon seeing the embroidered-robed man, Yi Jing, who had teleported with Han Li to Profound Depths Island. Han Li narrowed his eyes and swept his gaze past the rest of the cultivators, only to recognize the scar-faced man Xu Yun. None of the other cultivators that had arrived at Wondrous Depths Island along with him were present.

As for Yi Jing and Xu Yun, it seemed they had failed at forming their cores, as they were still at the late Foundation Establishment despite the many years that had passed.

Yi Jing grew somewhat nervous upon seeing Han Li continue looming in silence. After a moment of hesitation, he was about to speak again when Han Li cut him off, “I am looking for the Exquisite Sound Sect’s hidden city. Do you know the next time it will be open and where it will be?”

With an indifferent expression, Han Li gazed intently at Yi Jing.

When he heard Han Li’s question, Yi Jing’s expression relaxed and he tactfully replied, “Senior, the Exquisite Sound Sect’s city will be opening in about a month, and is set to open at Twin Peaks Island. It is several days west of here, and if Senior wishes to go,

Junior can bring him there.”

Han Li shook his head and mildly said, “There’s no need for that. It’ll be fine if you just give me a map.” He had no interest in reminiscing about times long past with this person.

The man was quite lucky. He had managed to survive the Beast Torrent, but the others likely hadn’t shared the same fate as him, causing Han Li to feel a slight sadness.

“Yes! Senior, here is a map of the sea and the location of the hidden city.”

Yi Jing revealed slight disappointment, but he still hoped to forge a friendly relationship with the Senior before him. With each passing day, the Outer Star Seas became increasingly dangerous for human cultivators. It would be greatly advantageous for him to be acquainted with a Core Formation cultivator.

But after taking another glance at Han Li’s detached expression, he could only drop the matter and take out a jade slip from within his robes. He recorded the location of the Exquisite Sound Sect into the jade slip and offered it to Han Li with both hands.

Han Li received it with a nod and took a quick look through it with his spiritual sense. Then without the slightest intention of staying, Han Li rushed through skies in a streak of azure light.

The low grade cultivators that were left behind gazed at him with envy. Nowadays in the Outer Star Seas, cultivators at Foundation Establishment and lower didn’t have the freedom to stray too far from their cave residences.

Han Li wasn’t about to meekly wait for another month as he feared that if he didn’t leave as soon as possible, Feng Xi would come knocking at his door. As a result, he was prepared to pay the Exquisite Sound Sect a significant sum to quietly teleport back to the Inner Star Seas. Of course, if they refused or became too greedy, he wasn’t going to shy away from using force.

Several days later, Han Li arrived at Twin Peaks Mountain. The island was quite expansive and had two huge mountains that were nearly the same in height.

After flying around of the mountains several times, he found the entrance to the hidden city as described on the map. After a moment of hesitation, Han Li changed his appearance back to what he had used when he had last visited the city. He then descended at the center of the mountain and took several steps towards a tree that was ten meters wide and about a hundred meters tall.

He expressionlessly glanced at the huge tree and couldn't help but scoff. He lightly flicked his finger, sending three orbs of white light to directly knock against the tree's bark.

A short moment later, azure light flashed and an opening appeared within the tree bark. A white-clothed old man at late Foundation Establishment walked out. He was the same gatekeeper that was in charge of the city entrance the last time he was here.

The old man recognized Han Li at a glance.

After all, there were very few Core Formation cultivators that had attended the meetings of the hidden city. Additionally, he had caught a few rumors during the last opening of the market city about how this cultivator had managed to single handedly suppress over ten Core Formation cultivators. It was very likely that the person in front of him was a Nascent Soul cultivator.

Upon seeing Han Li, the old man lowered his head and hastily gave him a deep salute, "So it was Senior Li. I hope Senior won't take offense, but may I ask what is your business for coming? There is still another month before our hidden city convenes. There are no treasures for Senior to browse."

The old man spoke with a respectful tone, but his eyes appeared puzzled.

Han Li examined the old man and raised his head before speaking in a deliberately arrogant manner, “I haven’t come for the hidden city. I’ve come to meet with either Sect Master Fan or Elder Yun.”

“You wish to see the Sect Master or Elder Yun?”

The old man paused for a moment before revealing a trace of hesitation.

“What? Is there a problem?” Han Li’s tone was void of emotion and his expression grew eerie.

When the old man saw this, he shivered and immediately smiled, saying, “Of course not!” A trace of cold sweat could be seen on his brow.

After some thought, the old man sincerely said, “Were it anyone else, it wouldn’t do. But since Senior personally arrived, then it must be about something important. This little old man will report back. As it just so happens, Sect Leader Fan recently arrived to take care of the arrangements for the hidden city. Senior, please wait for a moment!” He decided to hand off this troublesome matter to those above him. He couldn’t afford to offend such a fearsome character!

Han Li was happy to find that Lady Fan was present and his expression relaxed. He then said, “Then please be quick about it. I don’t have much time.”

The old man felt relief and hastily replied, “Yes, Junior will use a voice transmission talisman to inform the Sect Master. It will only take a moment!” If Han Li decided to force his way through, he would only be able to watch helplessly. There was no way he would throw his life away to try to block him. As a result, he took out a sound transmission talisman in front of Han Li and sent it into the tree’s opening.

After seeing the the sound transmission talisman disappear, Han Li expressionlessly asked, “Where is Elder Yun? Why isn’t he with

your Sect Master?”

The old man’s expression grew unsightly. He hesitated for a moment before muttering, “This... Junior truly doesn’t know about the whereabouts of Sect Leader Yun. Matters regarding this recent market city have all been handled by the Sect Master alone.”

Upon seeing the old man’s expression, Han Li was sure he knew what the old man had meant. With a cold chuckle, he no longer continued asking the old man any questions, much to his relief.

A short moment later, the white clothed cultivator received a sound transmission talisman. After quickly examining it with his spiritual sense, he respectfully said, “Senior Li, our Sect Master invites you inside for a chat. I will lead the way.”

Han Li indifferently replied, “Go ahead.”

The city below the tree was largely the same as the last hidden city with two floors making up a large underground expanse. But this time, apart from the many low grade Exquisite Sound Sect disciples preparing the city, there were no others inside.

The old man quickly brought Han Li to a stone wall that was attended by two outstandingly beautiful female cultivators.

The two female cultivators both respectfully bowed to Han Li with flushed complexions and charmingly said, “We pay our respects to Senior Li. The Sect Master welcomes you and is honored by your presence.”

Chapter 555: Exposed

Han Li glanced at the two women's expressions and stroked his chin in thought before wordlessly nodding his head.

One of the women reached out to the stone wall with her hand and summoned a stone gate in a flourish of azure light.

"This is as far as I can lead Senior. I will be taking my leave."

The old man took the opportunity to hastily withdraw.

Han Li didn't pay him any mind and walked inside. After passing through a short passageway, Han Li arrived within a large hall.

Wearing light green robes and a slight hint of make-up, Lady Fan respectfully awaited Han Li at the center of the hall with a beaming smile.

The woman deferentially bowed to Han Li and said, "I hope Senior hasn't taken offence that I didn't personally welcome you."

She then pulled out a chair and offered him a seat. He glanced at the chair with a raised eyebrow and sat down without the slightest restraint. Afterwards, his gaze fell onto the woman's beautiful face and he serenely said, "It seems Lady Fan isn't worried that I came with the intention to harm your sect."

Lady Fan walked to the side with light steps and took a seat at Han Li's side. She covered a smile with her hand and said, "Senior jests. With Senior's cultivation, how could he trouble himself over a Foundation Establishment Junior?"

At that moment, Lady Fan was only a meter away and her fragrant scent assailed his nose. Han Li faintly frowned, but otherwise his expression remained normal. However, when the woman took a seat, she unconsciously revealed a trace of astonishment. Afterwards, she examined Han Li with a strange expression.

With a cold glint passing through his eyes, Han Li thought to inquire about her actions, but at that moment, a dainty young woman walked over and placed a cup of fragrant tea in front of them before standing behind Lady Fan.

Lady Fan appeared indifferent to this, but a scowl had momentarily appeared on her face.

When Han Li glanced at the two women, his mind began to stir.

Lady Fan took a sip of the tea in front of her and pursed her lips. She then calmly asked, “Does Senior require something from our sect? We will do our utmost to assist if possible.”

“Since Lady Fan mentions it, I won’t drag this on. Did your sect already complete the transportation formation to return to the Inner Star Seas? I wish to use it.” Han Li casually spoke of the matter as if he had mentioned a trifling thing.

“Transportation formation?” Lady Fan paused for a moment, and her beautiful eyes blinked before revealing a mysterious smile. “I’m afraid I must disappoint you. The transportation formation has yet to be completed. However, it is possible that it will be completed soon. If you’d wait a while longer...”

Han Li didn’t wait for her to finish and callously interrupted her, “How much longer?”

Senior Fan hesitated for a moment before placing the cup back down onto the table. She explained, “It’s hard to say. Senior should already know that we lacked the Phantasm Stone for the spell formation. Elder Yun and the other Seniors went to retrieve more of the stone, but they alarmed the demon beasts in the region. A huge battle erupted and they were only able to acquire a meager amount of materials at the cost of many Seniors. Helpless, Elder Yun could only make a plan for future action. In fact...”

The female cultivator standing behind Lady Fan let out a small cough.

A sullen expression momentarily appeared on Lady Fan's face, but she soon stopped speaking as if a problem had arisen.

A trace of surprise appeared on Han Li's face, but after coldly gazing at the female cultivator behind Lady Fan, the woman fearfully lowered her head.

After a moment of thought, he stood up and said, "Since the transportation formation can't be used in the near future, then there is nothing to be said. I will be taking my leave."

When Lady Fan saw this, a complicated expression flickered within her eyes. She hesitated for a moment before saying, "Although we cannot help you with regards to the transportation formation, our sect has always held Core Formation Seniors in high esteem! How about Senior retires here for the night and sets off tomorrow?"

"Spend the night here?" Han Li thought to refuse her, but after looking into her eyes, he changed his mind, "That's fine. I'll set off the morning after then."

Lady Fan smiled with an odd expression, "Hehe! Our sect will be sure to properly entertain you. Servant, bring Senior Li to our best room."

A young woman promptly entered the room. Without speaking any unnecessary words, Han Li followed her outside.

However, when he was about to leave the hall, he thought to verify something and shot a deep glance behind him before calmly leaving.

After Han Li left the hall, the young woman that stood behind Lady Fan said, "Sect Master! Why do you intend on having him stay? Isn't that rash? This Senior Li rejected our enticements the last time around." Her voice was pleasant, but it contained an indescribable allure that was far superior to what her pretty appearance would grant her. Although her tone would still be

considered respectful, it contained much doubt.

“Yun Qin! You’re growing quite bold! I was merely attempting to forge good relations with a cultivator who possesses astonishing strength. Since when did you take charge of the Exquisite Sound Sect?”

Lady Fan grew sullen.

“I don’t dare. This disciples was merely following the orders of Elder Yun before he departed. I hope Sect Master won’t perform any actions that will make it difficult for me.” The young woman spoke with a humble tone, but displayed no intention of backing down.

“Humph! I will naturally inform Tian Yunxiao of this when he returns. As I still have duties to perform as Sect Master, I hope you’ll forgive me for not keeping you company!” Lady Fan’s expression grew icy and with a wave of her sleeve, she departed without looking back.

Only the young woman remained in the hall, wearing a complicated expression.

...

Inside a comfortable room, Han Li was lying down on a wooden bed, pondering as he stared at the ceiling.

He didn’t have any worries about spending the night at the market city. He had already swept his immense spiritual sense across the city and found that of those in the city the highest cultivation were at late Foundation Establishment. There were no Core Formation cultivators here, let alone any Nascent Soul eccentrics. Apart from any startling surprises, there was nothing to worry about.

However, he was now pondering whether or not he should spend the many years to fly back to the Inner Star Seas.

Suddenly, he heard a few knocks on his door.

“Come in.” Han Li said as he remained motionless on the bed. It seemed like he knew who was there and had been expecting them.

A sweet laugh came from the other side of the door and the door was pushed open to reveal Lady Fan. She walked into the room with lithe footsteps, fully displaying her thick black hair and extraordinary beauty.

Carrying her fragrant scent, she sat on the side of Han Li’s bed without the slightest discomfort and smiled at him, saying, “Senior still hasn’t slept despite the late hour. It seems he already knew that I was coming.”

With his eyes still shut, he calmly said, “Sect Master Fan was obvious enough during our meeting. So, what matter did you need to discuss with me in secret? I’ll let you know ahead of time that if it has nothing to do with the transportation formation, I am not interested.”

“Of course. With so many Nascent Soul eccentrics currently pursuing him in the Outer Star Seas, it is only natural for Elder Han to wish to return.”

Han Li’s body stiffened and he opened his eyes. He attentively stared at the woman before him and coldly asked, “What? Who is this Elder Han?”

Lady Fan stared back at Han Li with a calm expression and leisurely said, “I am naturally speaking of my sect’s own Elder Han.” She didn’t appear flustered in the slightest.

After a moment of silence, Han Li sat up and recovered his calm before slowly asking, “How did you recognize me? With your cultivation, you shouldn’t be able to see through my true appearance.”

With her slender white hand, she pulled back her hair and replied with a crafty expression, “I didn’t see through you. I smelled it.”

“You... smelled it?”

Han Li paused for a moment before wearing a confused expression.

Lady Fan pursed her lips and smiled, explaining, “Ever since I was small, I have been somewhat different from most. I was able to clearly tell people apart by smell. Additionally, whenever I remembered a smell, I would never forget it. Just as it so happened, I grew quite interested in Elder Han and I memorized his scent. But the last time the hidden city opened, Han Li was far too close to Wen Siyue and there were many people in the room. As a result, I was unable to clearly catch your scent. But having come so close to you today in the hall, I was able to identify you without problem.”

At that moment, Lady Fan gazed at Han Li with moist eyes and smiled at him with pursed lips.

Chapter 556: Request and Exchange

Han Li remained speechless after being told that he was identified by his scent. There were even people that were capable of recognizing others by their scent; there truly were too many bizarre things in this world. He was merely unfortunate enough to be discovered this way. However, he didn't display the slightest panic. So long as experts on the level of Man Huzi and Feng Xi didn't discover him, he had nothing to fear, given his current cultivation and treasures. Besides, this woman's knowledge was beyond his and she had deliberately sought him out in secret. He was convinced she had something in mind.

With that thought, Han Li mildly said, "Since Lady Fan has already recognized me, I won't continue to put up the act. However, should I now address you as the Envoy of the Left, or as Sect Master?"

Lady Fan responded to Han Li's words with a wry smile. "It seems Senior doesn't approve of my current role as Sect Master. I'm not sure if Senior knows, but if I hadn't followed the orders of the Devil Dao, the Exquisite Sound Sect would've been eliminated from the Scattered Star Seas. I admit I did long for the position of sect master, but my actions were a result of helplessness."

Han Li stretched his body and wore a lazy expression. "Lady Fan need not speak further of the matter. I have no interest in who is the sect master of the Exquisite Sound Sect. My status as an elder was only in name after all. However, it seems that Lady Fan knows a few things about me, could you tell me about this? I've grown quite curious."

With luminous eyes, Lady Fan smiled and said, "Although Senior Han's name can't be said to be known to everyone, it's quite the topic of interest among high grade cultivators at the very least. A single Core Formation cultivator snatched the Heavenvoid Cauldron under the presence of many Nascent Soul Eccentrics, and

then fled, disappearing without a trace.”

Han Li coldly smiled and directly addressed the woman, “That’s right, Lady Fan, Envoy of the Left. I assume almost everyone who knows of this wants me dead, but I also assume there are a few that have the vain dream of acquiring the treasure for themselves. Lady Fan, do you also hold those sentiments?”

The beautiful woman shook her head and said, “Senior jests. If I were a Core Formation cultivator, I might hold a few vain delusions, but ever since I failed in forming my core, I’ve already given up on ascending to the next stage of cultivation. That kind of treasure isn’t something that I could ever hope of obtaining. This little woman possess no intention of foolishly bringing trouble upon herself.”

Having examined her as she spoke, Han Li felt that her words were sincere. However, he wasn’t going to easily trust someone’s words and remained vigilant. He then calmly continued his questioning, “Apart from the Heavenvoid Cauldron, is there anything else that you’ve heard?” Previously, he hadn’t dared to make contact with high grade cultivators, resulting in a great lack of information. Since he had the opportunity to clear up some doubts, he may as well bluntly ask more questions.

“It seems that Senior has also heard quite a bit. There are quite a few rumors relating to Senior. It was said that Senior Han had spent many years in the nearby seas exterminating many cultivators as the Insect Devil. Junior cannot bring herself to believe this rumor. Since Senior had acquired the Heavenvoid Cauldron, how could Senior possibly act in such an inflammatory manner and still have concealed himself? I imagined that if it weren’t for the beast tide, the close friends and kin of the Insect Devil’s victims along with the various dubious inciters would’ve formed a hunting party specifically to chase you down!” The woman mysteriously smiled as she gazed at Han Li and covered her mouth as she chuckled.

Han Li calmly nodded his head and remained silent.

This caused Lady Fan to become somewhat apprehensive. Could it be that the vicious devil from the rumors was actually this Elder Han?

With an unchanged expression, Han Li asked, "Alright, how about Lady Fan explain the true objective of tonight's meeting?"

After a moment of hesitation, Lady Fan gritted her teeth and revealed an expression of deep resentment, "Since Elder Han has mentioned it, truthfully, I wish to request for Senior's assistance in helping me eliminate the vile schemer, Yun Tianxiao. With the abilities Senior displayed that day, it should be a matter of great ease."

Han Li paused for a moment. Then without revealing the slightest surprise, he calmly asked, "Yun Tianxiao? Is he not your supporter?"

Wearing an unsightly expression, Lady Fan resentfully said, "Senior, there is no need to mock me. Senior Han should've seen some of the details from today's matters in the hall. I've more or less become a puppet in the Exquisite Sound Sect. Were it not for the secret bewitchment techniques I possess as well as my faithful subordinates, I fear I wouldn't even be the Sect Master, puppet I may be."

Han Li expressionlessly said, "Since Envoy Fan rose to the position of Sect Master with the assistance of the Devil Dao, there should have been some understanding of what would follow. What point is there in complaining now? Being a puppet sect master is overall a better fate than death!" Han Li didn't display the slightest intention of agreeing.

Lady Fan wore a pained look before a malevolent expression flickered from her eyes as she spoke, "However, I now find my life quickly coming to an end. Not long ago, one of my trusted disciples mysteriously disappeared along with a jade slip containing the

secret techniques of the Exquisite Sound Sect. It most likely has fallen into the hands of Yun Tianxiao. After he has his personal female disciple successfully cultivate a few of the techniques, does Senior Han believe I'll still be kept alive? So long as Senior assists me in eliminating the treacherous bastard, I am willing to give most of the long accumulated resources of the sect to Senior Han. You may also do as you wish with the sect's maidens."

Without even thinking about the conditions she had laid out, Han Li bluntly said, "I have no interest in this. Please leave!"

Han Li didn't doubt her words. She had pretended to not know Han Li and secretly arranged an attempt to kill Yun Tianxiao. However, Han Li was unwilling to waste any time. There was someone actively hunting for him who was perfectly capable of killing him. If the entirety of the Exquisite Sound Sect had been offered to him after he managed to save himself, perhaps there would of been something to consider.

Lady Fan became perplexed upon seeing this. However, her continued pleading fell onto deaf ears. As a result, she muttered to herself for a moment with a fluctuating expression. Then with gritted teeth, she said, "If I had a method to send Elder Han to the Inner Star Seas in the near future, would Senior Han be willing to assist me?" After she said this, she nervously gazed at Han Li. This was the very last thing she could offer him.

Han Li blankly stared at her after she said this and replied without delay, "If you could send me to the Inner Star Seas within ten days, then the matter may as well be considered decided. However, a transportation formation requires Phantasm Stone. Could it be that Envoy Fan deliberately misled me earlier?" When he uttered the last words, his face grew sullen and his tone became ice-cold.

The beautiful woman felt her heart drop before she hastily explained, "Of course not. To Yun Tianxiao, the transportation formation is truly lacking in Phantasm Stone. However, he didn't

know that long ago, our sect paid a hefty sum for a few rare materials and Phantasm Stone was among them. Originally, I had planned to establish a few teleportation formations among the branch sects in the Inner Star Seas. However, I was dragged into the plot to bring the sect to the outer seas. After seeing Yun Tianxiao's insatiable ambition and cruelty, I naturally didn't take out the materials. Otherwise, had he brought us back to the Devil Dao at the Inner Seas, I would've had no opportunity to free myself."

After Han Li heard this, he was elated. However, he suppressed his excitement and pondered over this for a moment.

A short moment later, he raised his head and tranquilly said, "Take out the Phantasm Stones and let me look at them. Then, take me to where the transportation formation is located. If you truly have enough materials and are able to immediately finish the formation, I will take care of him." Han Li uttered each word with weight.

"This..." A trace of hesitation soon replaced the woman's joy.

"If you aren't able to do this, then I will reject your offer." Han Li stated with an unyielding tone.

Lady Fan frowned and said with embarrassment, "I'll do it! The materials are well kept, but I will be able to bring them to you tomorrow. However, the transportation formation construction site is quite a distance away. Additionally, a majority of the guards there are Yun Tianxiao's trusted disciples. I fear it will be somewhat difficult."

"Since we'll have to deal with Elder Yun anyways, what's the problem with taking care of his disciples as well? I'll just kill his disciples before taking his head." After some further thought, Han Li worriedly asked, "However, Yun Tianxiao's current location isn't too far away, right?"

Chapter 557: Securing the Transportation Formation

Two days later, an azure streak of light flew towards a small, nameless island to the west of Twin Peaks Island. When the azure light arrived above the island, it vanished to reveal Han Li and Lady Fan.

Han Li had found Lady Fan's speed to be annoyingly slow, and had bluntly enveloped her in his light and took both of them to their destination at greater speed.

Han Li looked at the island beneath him as he stood in the air, before indifferently asking, "The transportation formation is on this island?"

Lady Fan solemnly said, "That's right. There are eight Exquisite Sound Sect disciples guarding the transportation formation. Apart from two of my own subordinates, the rest are Devil Dao subordinates that Yun Tianxiao brought with him. Those six are all at Foundation Establishment and will not obey my orders."

"Got it. Call your subordinates over. I'll deal with the others." Malicious intent was clearly displayed on his face.

"Yes! Senior, it will take just a moment." Lady Fan followed his orders without hesitation and extended her hand with a sound transmission talisman between her fingers. The talisman trembled for a moment before sending off a streak of fire to the island.

Han Li saw the sound transmission talisman circle around the hill on the island and enter what appeared to be solid dirt. Then, the light disappeared with a flash as if it had entered a restriction.

A moment later, three people flew out from the earth: two alluring women and an old man. When they spotted Han Li and Lady Fan, they immediately flew towards them in a streak of light.

The two female cultivators deeply saluted and greeted Lady Fan

upon seeing her. Then, they curiously glanced at Han Li. Once they perceived that Han Li was a Core Formation cultivator, they were startled and immediately grew somber.

As for the blue-clothed old man that had accompanied the two, he arrogantly cupped his fist to Lady Fan and then glanced at Han Li with a trace of confusion.

The old man had thought to ask some questions, but didn't receive the chance to speak. Han Li had already identified him as an enemy and gazed at him with a trace of killing intent. He then wordlessly flicked his finger at the old man, shooting a streak of azure swordlight at him at lightning speed.

"Ah!" The old man was immediately overwhelmed with fear but the swordlight was truly too fast. He could only briefly yell before a finger thick hole appeared in his head.

The two female disciples paled with fright as they watched the old man's corpse drop from the sky. But upon seeing Lady Fan's cold indifference, the two came to a realization and silently glanced at one another.

"Are all the others down below?" Lady Fan asked the two women with a cold tone.

One of the women tactfully replied without delay, "Yes! The other five are down below at the spell formation. Disciple will lead the way for Sect Master and Senior."

"Yes, show Senior Li the way. We cannot allow any of them to escape." An eerie expression appeared on Lady Fan's beautiful face.

Now sure that Lady Fan had found someone to deal with Yun Tianxiao's men, the two women didn't show any further hesitation and brought Han Li and Lady Fan down to the hill.

One of the women took out a sparkling red command medallion and held it below her before shouting, "Open!" Red light then flew out of the talisman and struck the hill, revealing a fifteen-meter-

wide, yellow stone gate within the ripples of red light.

The female cultivator then smiled at Han Li and said with a pleasant voice, “Here it is. However, the five within are all at mid Foundation Establishment. Senior, please be careful.”

“I understand,” Han Li expressionlessly said. He then raised his hand and loudly shattered the stone gate with a beam of azure light. With an unchanged expression, Han Li directly flew inside.

The two female cultivators couldn’t help but glance at each other out of worry. However, Lady Fan held complete confidence in Han Li and called for them to follow her inside.

After Han Li passed through the stone gate, he found himself in a wide passageway about twelve meters long. However, he unconsciously narrowed his eyes as he saw two cultivators enter the passageway.

Without taking the time to examine their appearances, he opened his mouth and spat out two small, translucent swords that glowed with azure light. As soon as the swords left his mouth, they immediately flew towards the two cultivators who immediately appeared terrified.

Not fully understanding what was happening, they flusteredly took out a red scarf and a small yellow shield, wishing to block the incoming attack. Unfortunately for them, they immediately fell to the ground with miserable screams, and their two magic tools followed suit, falling to the ground with their spiritual Qi scattered.

Han Li stepped over the bodies and continued on his way without stopping. The two small swords started to revolve around Han Li as they followed after him.

Lady Fan and the other two were delighted by the scene and remained behind momentarily to deal with the corpses.

When the three women arrived at the end of the passageway,

they entered a hall over three hundred meters wide. Han Li was already standing at the center of the hall next to a small transportation formation, and was expressionlessly examining it as he looked down. The hall was filled with the scent of blood, presumably from the three dismembered corpses that were scattered throughout it.

When Lady Fan saw this, she wore a face of delight and had her two disciples take care of the rest of the corpses.

After Lady Fan arrived at Han Li's side, she pursed her lips and respectfully said, "It seems Senior's cultivation has reached a profound stage. He dealt with those Foundation Establishment cultivators with the ease of slaughtering livestock."

"Foundation Establishment cultivators don't pose any problem to me as I am now. More importantly, this is the transportation formation that you spoke of?" Han Li seemed to have placed his entire mind on the transportation formation before him.

Lady Fan eyes brightened as she said, "That's right! Senior should be able to see that the transportation formation is mostly completed. It is merely missing a few portions of Phantasm Stone before it can be used. As Senior saw the Phantasm Stone two days ago, he should know my words to be true."

"Since that is the case, I will naturally deal with Yun Tianxiao. However, does this transportation formation truly lead to Bright Emperor Island at the Inner Star Seas? To the best of my knowledge, that was merely an ordinary, mid-sized island. How could the Devil Dao cultivators have set up another formation at the other end?" Han Li frowned and stared at the transportation formation before him.

"I heard it before from Yun Tianxiao that Bright Emperor Island has an abandoned transportation formation created during the age of antiquity. The Devil Dao has molded it for their own uses, but the transportation formation is only capable of receiving

teleportations. Were it not the only transportation formation capable of accepting a teleportation from the Outer Star Seas, Yun Tianxiao wouldn't have chosen that location. Senior won't meet with any troubles after he teleports there." Lady Fan spoke to Han Li with a blank expression. She knew that the matter of the teleportation was extremely important to Han Li and she didn't dare to treat him poorly.

Han Li nodded in response and said nothing else. So long as there were no Nascent Soul eccentrics standing guard on the other side, even if there was some danger to be had, it wouldn't pose any problem to him with the miraculous abilities he currently possessed. Furthermore, he also knew that even if there was potential danger, it would be far less dangerous than flying all the way to the Inner Star Seas.

After examining the transportation formation for a while longer, Han Li turned towards Lady Fan and coldly said, "Immediately send your spell formation expert over here to complete this. I wish to use it the moment I return after I kill Yun Tianxiao, and I will be heading out immediately to deal with him. From what you've said, he'll be returning to Twin Peaks Island to manage the hidden city in six days at the latest."

He then made his way out of the hall with a stern expression.

...

As the days passed by, Han Li couldn't help but grow anxious. He clearly understood that the longer he remained in one place, the more likely that the demon cultivator Feng Xi would find him.

But Han Li felt especially vexed in the face of Feng Xi's wind spirit energy that had yet to disappear. When he said that it would disappear eventually, had he meant after a single year or several? Or, even worse, was he just lying about that?

Han Li had even swallowed a few Gold Devouring Beetles and had them nibble at it. But when he attempted this, he soon found that

this method wouldn't work.

For the beetles to consume the wind spirit energy, they must first eat through the threads of Divine Devilbane Lightning that surrounded it. But after creating a small hole in the threads of lightning, the wind spirit energy immediately flared, causing him to immediately mend the hole in fear. As a result, if he didn't plan to exterminate Yun Tianxiao and flee to the Inner Star Seas, Han Li would still be roaming the skies in fear of being tracked.

This ongoing matter filled Han Li's mind with anxiousness and dread.

Chapter 558: Enticement

After returning to Twin Peaks Mountain, Han Li assisted Lady Fan in exterminating the remaining cultivators that were loyal to Yun Tianxiao. Afterwards, he calmly awaited Yun Tianxiao's return to the city.

Five days later, Han Li was sitting in the area behind the city's hidden hall with closed eyes. Lady Fan was sitting beside him with a fluctuating expression.

At that moment, a streak of fire flew through the door and Lady Fan's eyes brightened as it flew into her open hand.

The fire released a woman's flustered voice, "Sect Master, it's terrible! Elder Yun brought Daoist Master Swift Crane with him. They've already arrived at the entrance of the city. Sect Master, please make preparations!"

"What? The old monster Swift Cane arrived with him?" Lady Fan crushed the sound transmission talisman in astonishment and wore an extremely unsightly expression.

"The Jade Cloud Sect's Swift Crane?" Han Li opened his eyes with a startled expression, but soon regained his calm.

"If it isn't that old Daoist, then who else could it be? It is too late to stop our plans since Yun Tianxiao's subordinates have already been cleanly exterminated. He will notice something is amiss in the city after being there for just a moment." Lady Fan's expression grew pale, but when she saw Han Li's calm expression, she felt slightly hopeful.

When Han Li saw her silently staring at him, he couldn't help but roll his eyes at her and sourly said, "What is Lady Fan looking at me for? Don't tell me that you expect me to stake it all in a battle against a Nascent Soul cultivator?"

Even though he said this, Han Li didn't feel particularly flustered

in the slightest. Since a threat on the level of Man Huzi and Wan Tianming hadn't arrived, he could make himself scarce without much of a problem. He was confident that he could escape from the hands of an early Nascent Soul cultivator with ease, especially with the miraculous abilities of his newly acquired Thunderstorm Wings. Of course, if it were possible, he still wanted to return to the Inner Star Seas with the transportation formation. As a result, Han Li was thinking of an alternative plan despite his previous words.

But when Lady Fan heard Han Li, her expression turned pale and she blankly stood in place. She was at a complete loss about what to do.

A short moment later, a cold glint flickered within Han Li's eyes. He licked his lips and asked with a serious tone, "Does that Swift Crane have a close relationship with Yun Tianxiao? If I were to suddenly kill Yun Tianxiao, would he take revenge on me?"

Lady Fan was startled when she heard Han Li, but hastily replied with delighted surprise, "Relationship? Yun Tianxiao merely used our Exquisite Sound Sect to form a loose connection with the old Daoist by giving our disciples over to him as cultivation vessels. He doesn't care about the matters of our Exquisite Sound Sect. However, you must kill Yun Tianxiao before he can cry for help. Otherwise, the old Daoist might truly intervene out of obligation."

"That's fine," Han Li then calmly ordered, "Drag that Yun Tianxiao into one of the neighboring rooms alone. I will kill him there in an instant. He won't have the time to call for help from Swift Crane. So long as you are in charge of the sect, the old Daoist won't be able to say anything. Afterwards, win over his favor by using some good conditions."

Displaying staunch decisiveness, Lady Fan gritted her teeth and agreed, "Yes! Since matters have reached this point, we can only do our utmost. Senior must exert his complete strength and kill Yun Tianxiao as quickly as possible! Please wait in the room

farthest away from here for the time being. I will bring him over.”

When Han Li saw this, he immediately walked to the hall's side door that led to a hallway with many variously sized rooms.

When he arrived at the door, Han Li thought of something and suddenly stopped. He turned around with a gloomy expression and icily said, “Sect Master Fan! After I kill Yun Tianxiao, don't get any ideas of revealing my identity to curry favor with old Daoist Swift Crane. With my current abilities, I can easily escape from Swift Crane's grasp despite not being able to fight against him. If that happens, Lady Fan should know what would happen to her! These words are only a warning to help you avoid doing something that wouldn't benefit either of us during a moment of panic.”

When Lady Fan heard him, she was startled for a moment. Her expression shifted several times before settling on a bitter smile. “Senior jests, I would never do such a wretched thing! Also, I am fully aware that Senior Han is far from a common Core Formation cultivator. Please be at ease, Senior. So long as you eliminate Yun Tianxiao, I will definitely follow through with our agreement.”

Han Li took a deep glance at the woman before heading off to the farthest room in the hallway without further hesitation. Apart from the somewhat smaller size, it was the overall the same as the other rooms in the hallway.

Han Li blurred and reappeared on a sandwood chair within the room. Afterwards, he closed his eyes and thoroughly restrained his Qi, preventing himself from being discovered by either Swift Crane or Yun Tianxiao.

With his late Core Formation cultivation, Han Li was confident that he could conceal himself from the spiritual sense of early Nascent Soul cultivators, but in the end, this was still only a guess. He could only try his hardest despite the slight doubts that he held in his heart.

In the main hall, Lady Fan was greatly on edge.

While she had spoken to Han Li as if she was completely confident in him, the woman was also completely unsure as to whether Han Li could kill Yun Tianxiao in an instant.

Although Han Li had nearly killed Yun Tianxiao at the previous trade meeting with but a raise of his hand, that was likely due to catching Yun Tianxiao off guard. But as Lady Fan was an extremely shrewd person, she forcefully suppressed the distracting thoughts in her mind and poured herself a cup of tea.

As she slowly sipped the tea, she quickly regained her calm.

At that moment, footsteps came from the hall's entrance. Soon, a middle-aged Daoist wearing a white crane embroidered robe and a Confucian-robed man entered the hall.

“Senior Swift Crane, Elder Yun!” Lady Fan deliberately cried out with a surprised expression. She then quickly placed down the tea cup she held at her lips and saluted Daoist Swift Crane.

Swift Crane indifferently nodded his head and remained silent as if he belonged to a realm beyond hers. But when Yun Tianxiao entered, he unconsciously frowned and his face revealed a trace of confusion.

Yun Tianxiao returned her salute and angrily said, “Why isn’t Yun Qin attending to the Sect Master? Is she slacking off? I will have to properly discipline her.”

“Yun Qin! She...” Lady Fan revealed hesitation and glanced at Swift Crane.

Yun Tianxiao paused for a moment before speaking with an expression of annoyance, “Sect Master, Senior Swift Crane cannot be considered an outsider! Go ahead and speak.”

Lady Fan wore a similarly displeased expression and responded, “Since that is the case, then I will say it. Yun Qin is attending to a vagrant cultivator who is in possession of some Phantasm Stone and wishes to sell it. Yun Qin was steadfast in wanting to

personally deal with the person, so I had no choice but to remain here.”

Yun Tianxiao was about to say something to Swift Crane, but when he heard the words ‘Phantasm Stone’ his body trembled and he revealed delight. “What? Phantasm Stone?”

Likewise, Swift Crane’s eyes grew bright upon hearing these words and his eyes narrowed.

Appearing as if she were wronged, she coldly spoke with a grimace, “Humph! Elder Yun’s close disciple insisted on handling the matter alone, refusing to allow this Sect Master to participate.”

Yun Tianxiao dryly coughed and said, “Yun Qin had truly overstepped herself. However, I’m sure this wasn’t done deliberately. Sect Master, where are they? I don’t feel entirely at ease.” He then turned to Swift Crane and respectfully said, “Senior Swift Crane, please wait for a moment. There is something that I must deal with first. How about we continue our discussion later?”

Swift Crane smiled and casually said, “Since Fellow Daoist Yun has some matters to attend to, I’ll just sit here for the time being.”

Yun Tianxiao immediately revealed delight and turned towards Lady Fan.

Lady Fan reluctantly said, “Follow me, Elder Yun. I’ll bring you there.” She slowly walked to the side door as if she was unwilling.

With his mind feverishly occupied by thoughts of the Phantasm Stone, all of his suspicions of Lady Fan’s actions had been wiped clean and he hastily followed after her.

Swift Crane casually glanced at the two from behind before finding a chair and aloofly took a seat.

Yun Tianxiao excitedly followed Lady Fan to the room at the very end of the hallway where the door was tightly closed.

“It’s right here! Have a good chat. In any case, this sect master is

simply incapable of interfering with this deal!” Lady Fan snorted and walked back to the hall with dissatisfaction.

When Yun Tian Xiao saw this, a cold smile momentarily appeared on his face. He then opened the door without any hesitation and directly entered the room.

Chapter 559: Sudden Developments

Upon entering the room, Yun Tianxiao spotted a male cultivator sitting at the room's center. He appeared to be fiddling with something sparkling in his hand. Yun Tianxiao then swept his gaze across the room and astonishingly found no sight of Yun Qin. Startled, his heart trembled as he grew vigilant.

He stared at the man and slowly said, "Who is your esteemed self and where is that girl Yun Qin?" The magic treasure in his body was already stirring restlessly inside body.

Han Li chuckled and raised his head, "Could it be that Brother Yun has already forgotten about me?"

"It's you?!" Yun Tianxiao was greatly shocked when he clearly saw the man's appearance. Without any further thought, he fled in a streak of light.

"Too slow!" Just after Han Li emotionlessly said this, a light pulsed from his hands.

Then with a flourish of radiance around Yun Tianxiao, five copper bands of varying colors appeared around his limbs and neck. These bands released a low hum before tightening and restraining him.

He screamed out of fright and hastily thought to release his magic treasure. However, his magic treasure didn't move in the slightest as if it were shackled.

Yun Tianxiao was frightened out of his mind and couldn't help but panic, loudly screaming, "Senior Swift Crane, please save me!"

But just as he shouted this, Han Li opened his mouth and spat out an azure streak of light. It revolved once around Yun Tianxiao before cleaving off his head. Then, without the slightest hesitation, Han Li snatched the storage pouch from the corpse and recalled his Five Element Bands.

The chain of events had concluded at lightning speed. But at the same moment Yun Tianxiao's storage pouch entered Han Li's grasp, he heard a loud explosion from within the room.

The room's wall had been smashed open and Daoist Swift Crane flew inside the room through the cloud of ash.

The old Daoist gloomily glanced at the beheaded corpse on the ground and turned his gaze to Han Li. With killing intent shining within his eyes, he shouted, "You're courting death!"

He then flicked his hand and a streak of blinding, scorching white light arrived in front of Han Li in an instant.

With pupils contracted and a trembling heart, Han Li wildly enlarged the Five Element Bands in his hand, covering his body in a multi-colored cylinder. At that same moment, he took a red and yellow jade scepter out with a turn of his hand.

Since this was the first time Han Li had blocked a Nascent Soul cultivator's attack since reaching late Core Formation stage, he naturally had some interest in testing whether or not his incisive treasures could receive the attack. However, despite his calm exterior, he felt completely perturbed and uncertain.

Bang! White and rainbow light collided.

Han Li felt as if he was struck by a heavy hammer, and was sent flying before striking the wall behind him. His head was left spinning from the impact.

"Huh?!" While Han Li was still in a daze from the strike, Swift Crane let out an astonished shout.

With yet another white light appearing before his eyes, Han Li took a cold breath and resolutely waved his jade scepter. A red and yellow barrier of light appeared around his body from within the rainbow cylinder.

As a result, he was able to receive the next attack much better than the first. He only staggered a few steps away before regaining

his bearings.

Han Li then steeled his heart as his mind began to stir, and a pair of silver white wings emerged from his back.

Leaving a roll of thunder behind, he instantly disappeared, dodging the next streak of white light. A moment later, he reappeared at another corner of the room.

Han Li had now identified the true form of Swift Crane's white light. It was a small, jade hammer covered in sparkling white light and the oval head was covered in talisman characters. Although it was only the size of a palm, it released astonishing spiritual Qi.

After Swift Crane's strike had missed, his face stirred and he extended his arm. With a rustle of wind, the small hammer returned into his sleeve.

A trace of astonishment flickered from Swift Crane's eyes as he said, "I didn't expect that a Core Formation cultivator would be in possession of so many ancient treasures. What is your name?"

Han Li pursed his lips and was about to say something when the door of the room suddenly opened as Lady Fan excitedly entered the room.

Lady Fan gave Swift Crane a formal bow and spoke to him with an exceptionally respectful tone, "Senior Swift Crane! This is Senior Li who I specially invited in order to deal with the traitor Yun Tianxiao. I hope Senior will be at ease. I am willing to double any conditions that the traitor may have raised."

When Swift Crane heard this, he frowned and turned his gaze to the corpse on the floor. His expression wavered.

Fortunately, Han Li only had to silently stand in place. However, Lady Fan appeared quite nervous as she watched Swift Crane's expression.

Swift Crane eventually relaxed and said, "Alright, since this is an internal matter of the Exquisite Sound Sect, this old Daoist won't

meddle. But don't forget what you just said, Lady Fan."

Lady Fan felt her heart swell with relief as she pledged with a beaming smile, "Please be at ease, Senior. I won't dare to break my word!"

The old Daoist nodded his head and glanced at Han Li with suspicion.

After a moment of silence, he suddenly asked, "Where did Fellow Daoist Li cultivate? Your appearance is quite unfamiliar!"

Han Li's heart trembled and he pondered for a moment. When he opened his mouth to dispel Swift Crane's suspicions, he was only able to utter, "Junior..." before his face pulsed with azure light and underwent a massive change.

The wind spirit energy within his body had suddenly flared.

From its violent eruption, it was clear that Feng Xi was close by.

With fury and alarm, Han Li suppressed it with the entirety of his magic power. After forcefully suppressing the wind spirit energy, he felt cold sweat lining his body.

Han Li let out a breath of relief after saving himself from the crisis, but when he turned his gaze to Swift Crane, he saw a trace of astonishment. It then turned into a strange expression of delight.

Han Li suddenly thought of something and grasped his face. He instantly paled. The flare of Wind Spirit Energy had caused him to revert back to his original appearance.

A malevolent expression appeared on Daoist Swift Crane's face as he shouted, "Han Li!"

Han Li let out a stream of curses in his heart. Without taking the time to think any further, he flapped his wings and suddenly disappeared with a flash of lightning, leaving only thunder behind. At that same moment, the old man flung his sleeve and disappeared in a streak of light. The only one left inside the room

was Lady Fan who was left in a bewildered daze.

A flicker of silver light appeared above Twin Peaks Island, accompanied by the sudden appearance of Han Li. In the following moment, a streak of white light violently flew up from the island and quickly pursued him.

Han Li's expression sank and he immediately imbued the Thunderstorm Wings within his body with Divine Devilbane Lightning. An instant later, he reappeared a hundred meters away. These flashes continued, each time with thunder left in his wake.

In the blink of an eye, Han Li had already been reduced to a small, black dot on the horizon.

When Swift Crane saw this, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He then came to the conclusion that the wings were certain to be a treasure from the Heavenvoid Cauldron and his heart grew wildly fervent.

With a shout, he transformed into a streak of blinding radiance and set off in hot pursuit of Han Li, tearing through the skies with booms left in his wake.

In an instant, the black and white dots could no longer be seen from the island.

In the lead, Han Li was slowly increasing the distance between him and Daoist Swift Crane with the incredible speed of the Thunderstorm Wings.

It wouldn't take Han Li much longer until he shook off the Daoist Swift Crane with his current speed. But at that moment, the wind spirit energy flared once more within his body and continued to flare in regular intervals.

Han Li was forced to periodically stop and use his magic power to suppress the backlash of the wind spirit energy. However, this delay had given Swift Crane the opportunity to latch his spiritual sense onto Han Li, allowing him to ceaselessly pursue him.

However, this wasn't Han Li's biggest worry. The flares of wind spirit energy were growing increasingly violent, displaying just how close Feng Xi was to him.

Helpless and on the edge of despair, Han Li steeled his resolve and rushed towards the small island with the transportation formation. He hoped Lady Fan had truly given the order to complete the transportation formation and that they had managed to complete it by the time he arrived. So long as he was able to reach the island, he would have the opportunity to escape pursuit from Swift Crane and Feng Xi.

Although the Thunderstorm Wings were astonishingly fast, it consumed a significant amount of Divine Devilbane Lightning. As a result, after he gained enough distance from Swift Crane, he swapped the wings for his blood-red cloak.

Chapter 560: The Return of Feng Xi

As Han Li flew, he continued to use his magic power to suppress the flare ups from the wind spirit energy. However, his body still trembled from the effort, and it was becoming more difficult to control with each flare.

The current situation filled Han Li with dread. He now suspected that the reason why Feng Xi hadn't used the wind spirit energy more frequently during the previous chase was likely due to a combination of his exhaustion from refining the magic treasure and the backlash from the green liquid. Had these intense flare ups occurred back then, events would've played out much differently. However, upon seeing the small island in the distance, Han Li grew relieved.

Although it had taken him two days to arrive at the small island in the past, it now only took the majority of a day while flying at his top speed. So long as the transportation had been finished by the time he arrived, he would be able to return to the Inner Star Seas without harm. Although he would have to guard against a few Nascent Soul eccentrics, it was better than being relentlessly chased down by the metamorphosed demon beast, Feng Xi.

While these thoughts bounced around in Han Li's mind, he heard a voice transmission from behind him.

Swift Crane said in a slow, calm and gentle voice, "Fellow Daoist Han, this humble Daoist holds no malicious intentions. I only wish to exchange for a Heavenmend Pill. There is no need for Fellow Daoist to flee with such intensity." Truly, his words felt sincere, kind, and lacking any hint of maliciousness. Normally, one would feel quite favorable toward such a voice.

However, Han Li wasn't moved in the slightest by his tone or words, and inwardly cursed upon hearing them. Due to his decreased speed from switching to the blood-red cloak from the

Thunderstorm Wings, Han Li could once again see Swift Crane's light in the distance whenever he looked behind him.

As soon as the old Daoist had entered within range of him, he started using some sort of abnormal technique to continuously send Han Li bewitching messages filled with enticement in an attempt to slow him down. During a moment of carelessness, Han Li had nearly been affected by the technique. Fortunately, the Great Development Technique had automatically activated and protected him, promptly clearing his mind. Although he had managed to avoid falling into Swift Crane's trap, Han Li still felt his body break out in a cold sweat.

It appeared that even Nascent Soul cultivators were adept in the usage of bewitchment techniques. Swift Crane's own techniques far surpassed Lady Fan's; they were even on par with Yuan Yao's. As for the old Daoist's promises that he merely wanted to trade for a Heavenmend Pill and meant him no harm, Han Li would have to be touched in the head to truly believe that.

As Han Li saw the small island growing closer, he didn't dare to delay his departure and streaked towards the island with a flourish of sparkling red light.

At that moment, a brilliant light flashed from across the sky, filling the air with a chilling whistle. A vague black dot appeared where the light had faded away, and instantly grew larger as it flew in Han Li's direction at a frightening speed.

When Han Li saw this, his heart shook. Even if he couldn't clearly see the black streak's appearance, that fearsome speed and violent whistle couldn't possibly be from anything other than a certain grade nine Windbreaker Beast.

As Han Li bitterly cursed, wings instantly emerged from his back in a flash of silver light.

Since the demon had already appeared, Han Li strove his hardest to reach the small island, else he would have no chance of survival.

Even if he were to turn and flee at that moment, he feared he wouldn't be able to escape Feng Xi's fearsome speed even if he exhausted the entirety of his Divine Devilbane Lightning.

With that thought, Han Li disappeared with a roll of thunder, turning into an arc of silver lightning. Each time Han Li reappeared, he was drawing closer to the small island.

When Swift Crane heard the piercing whistle, his expression greatly changed. Although the Daoist didn't know who that person was, he could faintly feel that they were a fearsome character. When he saw the black dot make its way toward Han Li without the slightest hesitation, he naturally believed that it was for the Heavenvoid Cauldron and he became extremely anxious.

Desperate, Swift Crane opened his mouth and spat out a mist of blood essence. The mist turned into a huge, blood-red cloud and enveloped the old Daoist. The white crane patterns on his robes then glowed with a white light and completely absorbed the surrounding blood mist, instantly staining the cranes scarlet.

Swift Crane then began to spin his body around, enveloping himself in a blinding white light and releasing the cries of cranes.

A ten-meter-long crimson crane with emerald green eyes appeared before him.

When Swift Crane saw this, his face grew sullen and he sat upon the huge crane in a blur. He then quickly clapped the head of the crane. Its eyes flickered with green light as it extended its wings, carrying the old Daoist a hundred meters away in the blink of an eye.

Although he was still slower than Han Li's lightning movements, he was still far faster than before.

As a result, a bizarre scene unfolded in the nearby skies.

As Han Li pushed forward with his warped movements, both the whistling black blur in front of him and the crimson crane from

behind him rushed straight towards him.

A few seconds later, Han Li had arrived above the small island. At that same moment, the black blur was now only a few kilometers away, travelling at an unbelievable speed.

Han Li's heart turned icy when he clearly saw the demon beast's appearance. It was a bizarre form with the body of a bird and a fish tail, both covered in three meter long feathers. Below its abdomen were two incredibly sharp claws covered in inch large scales that sparkled with an azure light.

Feng Xi was using his demon beast form to hunt him down. Although high grade demons found it awkward to fight against humans while in their beast form, it allowed them to use their innate characteristics without restraint. In this case, it allowed a Windbreaker Beast to display their innately extraordinary speed.

After taking a cold breath of air, Han Li didn't dare to further delay and disappeared in a flash of silver light. He reappeared at the island's surface only to disappear once more.

When the demon beast saw this, his piercing whistle came to an abrupt halt. With a few more flaps of his wings, he crossed the remaining couple of kilometers in a mere instant. After arriving above the island, he transformed into his human form with a bright flourish of azure light.

Much to his dismay, Swift Crane saw Feng Xi's transformation as he continued to chase after Han Li. After seeing that Feng Xi looked nearly the same as an ordinary human, he felt a chill run down his entire body.

Staring in awe, Swift Crane felt his blood run cold. "Grade nine demon beast? And it's an extremely fast bird-type."

Ordinarily, when high grade humans and demon beasts met, it didn't necessarily result in a battle to the death. But if there was a huge disparity in the strength between them, a bloodbath was

unavoidable. After all, regardless of whether it were for the demon beasts' cores or the humans' Nascent Souls and golden cores, they were both extremely coveted by the opposing side.

As grade nine demon beasts were slightly above mid Nascent Soul cultivators, the old Daoist inwardly cursed at the encounter. Were this any other time, he would've already turned tail and fled without a word, but with the Heavenvoid Cauldron before his eyes, he couldn't bring himself to relinquish it. As a result, he raised his hands with a pale face and held an ancient blue mirror in one hand along with a small jade hammer in the other. With the two ancient treasures in hand, the old Daoist's courage was strengthened and he gloomily stared at the demon beast.

When Feng Xi saw Han Li's wings and his adept usage of them, he was initially amazed before subsequently becoming filled with an immense, bitter regret. Even if he managed to kill Han Li and refine the Thunderstorm Wings, he would only be able to draw out seventy percent of the magic treasure's might at most since it had already recognized another master, further stoking the flames of hatred towards Han Li.

As a result, even though Feng Xi had seen Swift Crane, he had completely ignored the old Daoist; his mind was completely focused on Han Li. He faced the Daoist and coldly shouted, "F*ck off!" before blurring in the direction of the island.

Daoist Swift Crane was stunned for a moment before gritting his teeth and flying in pursuit. The Heavenvoid Cauldron was the top ranked secret treasure in the Scattered Star Seas, and even if he had to risk his life, he had to acquire it.

At that moment, Han Li quickly changed his face while he was flying through a passage after breaking through the stone gate. After several more flickers of lightning, he appeared before the transportation formation where several Exquisite Sound Sect cultivators were currently bantering with each other. When they saw Han Li appear, they instantly found their throats choked from

the shock.

Han Li appeared at the side of the transportation formation before wildly roaring at the disciples, “Is the transportation formation finished!?”

One of the disciples recognized Han Li and respectfully replied, “Ah! Yes, Senior Li! The transportation formation has been finished. However, we’ve yet to test it. We were...”

But before she could finish speaking, his body blurred and he appeared inside the transportation formation.

At nearly the same moment, a hole was suddenly ruptured from the ceiling and the demon cultivator Feng Xi dropped down in a streak of azure light.

Han Li’s face instantly drained of blood!

Chapter 561: A Mistaken Identity

When Feng Xi saw Han Li within the transportation formation, his eyes widened and his face twitched. Although he had been confused as to why Han Li would seek his own destruction by hiding on this small island, it was beyond his wildest dreams for a transportation formation to be there. Before his eyes, Han Li cast a series of hand incantations and spat out a mouthful of blood essence. He was sparing none of his true essence to hasten the activation of the transportation formation, which had already begun to hum

“NO!” Feng Xi furiously roared. He instantly opened his mouth and fiercely shot a ball of azure light towards a corner of the formation. If the formation was broken before the activation completed, Han Li was as good as his.

Immediately after unleashing the attack, Feng Xi’s body blurred as he madly rushed at the formation with a fervent bloodlust in a desperate attempt to interrupt Han Li’s teleportation.

However, he was too late.

Han Li responded to his attack by shooting over ten streaks of sword Qi to slow down the ball of azure light. As for Feng Xi’s mad charge, Han Li didn’t possess the slightest intention to dodge. The spell formation had already begun to shine with a dense white light, enveloping Han Li within it.

When Feng Xi arrived in front of the transportation formation in his mad rush, Han Li had already disappeared from within the light in a series of blurs.

With neither a displacement talisman on hand nor knowledge of where the transportation formation led to, Feng Xi was forced to abandon his pursuit.

At that moment, Swift Crane flew in through the shattered

ceiling. After seeing the faint glow of white light from the formation, his expression immediately revealed both fury and amazement.

Unfortunately for Swift Crane, his sudden appearance had made him the new target of Feng Xi's gaze. Killing intent began to emanate from his blood-red eyes.

“All the humans here... WILL DIE!” Brimming with rage after Han Li escaped right before his eyes, Feng Xi brutally shouted. His entire body blazed with an azure light, and instantly turned into a streak of azure light, pouncing towards Swift Crane in a display of overbearing ferocity!

Swift Crane's expression massively changed at the sudden change of events and he instinctively threw out his ancient mirror and jade hammer in panic.

Beams of different colors burst forth from the cave and intertwined as they shone down upon the previously tranquil island.

...

A month later, the human cultivators in the nearby seas heard that the Nascent Soul cultivator Daoist Master Swift Crane fleshly body had been exterminated by a grade nine demon beast. In order to survive, he had to exhaust the entirety of his body to transport his Nascent Soul back to his cave residence. For a while after this event human cultivators were left trembling in fear at the demon beast's viciousness.

However, none of them could've expected that such a momentous event was only the beginning.

Several months later the flood dragons of the depths suddenly dispatched large quantities of high grade members to scour the seas, hunting all human cultivators at Core Formation and beyond.

Although this only lasted for a few short years, the devastation it

caused among high grade cultivators was comparable to the beast torrent. There were even two Nascent Soul eccentrics that had met their end after being surrounded by several grade nine demon beasts.

From that moment on, whenever word of any flood dragons appeared in the nearby seas, no humans dared to rashly leave their cave residences. This continued for over ten years before the lingering fear finally started to fade.

However, the few cultivators that had been fortunate enough to escape from the demon beast's hands were bewildered to discover that all them were searching for a Core Formation cultivator surnamed Li. Anyone remained silent in the face of flood dragon's interrogation about him would find themselves immediately attacked.

As a result, many cultivators came to believe that the massive wave of attacks from the flood dragons was likely a result of this Cultivator Li. Just what had this person done to enrage the flood dragons to this degree!?

When word of this spread, everyone it became common to hear people cursing this unknown cultivator for having invited this calamity upon all of them. It reached the point where everyone wanted to find this Cultivator Li and capture him, delivering him to the flood dragons as an apology and to appease their rage.

However, everyone was bewildered to discover that there was no one by the name of Li among the higher grade cultivators. So even if they wanted to apprehend him for his offences, they were incapable of even trying.

...

In a flash of white light, the now infamous Han Li appeared in an unfamiliar place with a Greater Displacement Medallion in hand.

As a result of his careful nature, Han Li had already prepared for

the possibility of meeting enemies upon arrival and had preemptively changed his appearance to that of an unfamiliar man. Before he had even managed to recover from the dizziness caused by the teleportation, Han Li heard a lazy voice from his side, “It seems that your esteemed self has a penchant for punctuality as well. You and I were the first to arrive, and are stuck waiting on the others!”

Upon hearing this, Han Li inwardly trembled and grunted in response before moving off of the formation and standing off to the side.

Not far from the transportation formation, there was a black-clothed man wearing a hood that grinned upon seeing Han Li, revealing his gleaming white teeth.

However, when Han Li clearly saw this person’s appearance, he immediately felt his stomach lurch. The man appeared truly frightening with a face so shriveled he looked like a skeleton. Additionally, his eyes twinkled with a faint blue light.

Despite his shock, Han Li didn’t dare to scorn him, because he could tell at a glance that this skeletal looking man was a mid Core Formation cultivator. He could already be considered a rarely seen high grade cultivator among the Scattered Star Seas.

At the same time that Han Li saw his face, the skeletal man realized Han Li was a late Core Formation cultivator. Astonishment clear in his eyes, his tone became much more respectful as he continued, “The others should be arriving soon, so please feel free to take a short rest, Brother. We can look forward to all of the rewards we will reap from the upcoming operation, hehe.”

Han Li was at a loss about what to do, but under such vague circumstances he could only nod his head and maintain his stiff expression to avoid making any mistakes.

He felt his heart slightly relax after examining his surroundings,

and discovering that they matched the description of Bright Emperor Island that Lady Fan had given him. When the Exquisite Sound Sect Disciple had said that the transportation formation was untested, Han Li had felt slightly uneasy. In the end his luck held out and he had truly returned to the Inner Star Seas after all these years.

He was currently in a cave over sixty meters wide, and apart from the ancient transportation formation that he had appeared from, Han Li saw two additional transportation formations in the cave. While Han Li chatted with the skeletal man, another transportation formation flickered with yellow light, faintly revealing a tall silhouette.

The black-robed man's eyes immediately brightened and he hurriedly walked over. Han Li took the opportunity to quietly shoot two small streaks of azure light from his legs into the transportation formation below him, creating a crack in it that would be difficult to spot.

As a result of this small crack, the ancient transportation formation was disabled and he no longer had to fear any pursuit from either Swift Crane or Feng Xi.

It appeared that Han Li's covert sabotage had gone unnoticed by both the black-clothed man and the cultivator that had just arrived. While the two of them were lively bantering with each other, Han Li inspected the new arrival and discovered it was a large man with a fiendish appearance.

When Han Li saw them speaking with each, he silently walked down from the transportation formation and headed towards the cave opening. However, he had only walked a few steps before he heard the black-robed man say with an astonished tone, "Brother, not everyone has arrived yet. I was told that there would be five people simultaneously taking action, and the rest of our orders and members have yet to arrive. It would be best for us to wait in the cave for the time being. Otherwise, it will be hard to explain! Now

that I think about it, Fellow Daoist's appearance is quite unfamiliar! Is there any chance that this is the first time that Brother has participated in an operation like this?"

For some unknown reason, the black-robed man hadn't doubted Han Li's identity since he arrived despite not recognizing him.

Han Li slightly frowned at the question before mumbling with a deliberately impatient voice, "How troublesome, none of this was explained to me."

"Hehe! Since Fellow Daoist's cultivation is quite high, it is only natural for your guide to be hesitant in telling you what to do. However, Brother should exercise some patience. So long as you complete your task, you're free to do as you wish." The black-robed man faintly smiled and seemed to be implying something.

When Han Li heard this, he managed to come up with a fairly certain idea about what was going on. After slightly rolling his eyes, he intended to give a vague response, but right then another transportation formation began to radiate light before bringing forth two more people.

A strange expression flickered deep within Han Li's eyes upon seeing the new arrivals. One of whom was an old man who had blue flame emblems that emitted a faint spiritual Qi, and flickered as if they were alive embroidered on his wide robes. Based on his appearance he seemed to be some notable character, while at his side stood a lean, elegant man.

With the appearance of these two, there were now five people in the cave and Han Li was the sole late Core Formation cultivator. The skeletal man was at mid Core Formation, while the large man and the old man were both at early Core Formation. As for the lean, elegant man, he was only at the late Foundation Establishment stage.

Chapter 562: Yuan Yao And The Azure Yang Sect

Just like the skeletal man and the fiendish man, the new arrivals didn't ask any questions about Han Li's identity either. When the elegant man saw that there were five people present, he directly saluted the three people that had arrived earlier and respectfully said, "I am Ke Yu. With respect, I've come to deliver your orders and guide you. Here is my proof of identity, please feel free to confirm it." The elegant man then took out a black command medallion and handed it over to Han Li. As he clearly had the highest cultivation among the three that had first arrived, he naturally took the leading position.

Han Li wordlessly received the medallion and glanced at it before casually tossing it to the skeletal man.

The skeletal man took a cursory glance at it as well and then casually tossed it back to the elegant man. He then said with a lazy tone, "What use is there in showing the command medallion? Since a Foundation Establishment cultivator such as yourself was allowed to use the teleportation formation, there is little doubt about your role. As for our identities, there is also no use in examining them. We've only arrived here due to receiving orders as enforcers; it is impossible for there to be outsiders. So how about you start telling us our orders?"

The skeletal man appeared quite familiar with the process and boldly spoke with an expression of impatience.

When the elegant man heard this, he hesitated for a moment before revealing an embarrassed smile. He didn't raise the matter about identifying Han Li or the others and only let out a dry cough before introducing the old man at his side.

"This is Senior Ding, an enforcer of the Azure Yang Sect. Your assignment is to assist Senior Ding in capturing a criminal of the

Azure Yang Sect. Senior Ding will continue with the details, this Junior's role was merely to introduce him." He then obediently stepped back and deferred to the old man beside him.

"Azure Yang Sect? Don't tell me that it's Lord Three Yang's Azure Yang Sect?" A blue glint appeared in the skeletal man's eyes as he revealed astonishment.

When Han Li and the fiendish man to his side heard this, they also revealed surprise.

The Azure Yang Sect Elder surnamed Ding faintly smiled and saluted the three, "Hehe, it seems there is no need for me to speak of my sect's founder since you already know his name. The Martial Ancestor has personally requested Coalition Leader Archsaint Six Paths for this matter. This is due to the fact that not only is the criminal a Core Formation cultivator but she is also in possession of many of the Azure Yang Sect's most valuable treasures. It has already been many years since she escaped, but we recently acquired word of her whereabouts. Had the Martial Ancestor personally set out to capture her, it would naturally be quite easy, but unfortunately, he has more pressing matters at hand. As such, he was forced to ask you Fellow Daoists for assistance. With us four Core Formation cultivators, we will be able to capture that witch alive with certainty." When he said that last sentence, his expression subconsciously became stern.

After hearing him say 'witch', the fiendish man bewilderedly asked, "Is this criminal a female cultivator?"

Han Li frowned, having faintly recalled something.

"That's right, the witch is called Yuan Yao. Originally, she was a concubine that was prepared for the young sect master. However, it was beyond our expectations that this witch would be so vicious and merciless, and using her outstanding beauty and bewitchment techniques, she conspired with another woman and killed the young sect master in secret. Yuan Yao then took the young sect

master's treasures and precious medicine pills and fled, later succeeding in Core Formation. As that young master was Martial Ancestor Three Yang's sole descendant, he naturally has a bone-deep hatred for the woman and views her as a top priority. So long as you three assist me in capturing the woman alive, our sect will be certain to repay you accordingly. We won't leave you under compensated for your efforts." The old man gritted his teeth as he spoke of the objective

The skeletal man and the fiendish man glanced at each other with a meaningful gaze. As for Han Li, he rubbed his nose in complete silence.

'So the culprit turned out to be Yuan Yao!' This mysterious and beautiful woman's shocking history was far beyond Han Li's imagination.

He had been suspicious about how the woman had managed to reach Core Formation in such a small period of time and why she had acted in such a secretive manner, but he wouldn't of guessed that she had stolen everything from the corpse of a young sect master and was being pursued by the Azure Yang Sect. The many precious medicine pills on the Young Master seemed to have greatly benefited Yuan Yao. But now, it seemed the woman was trapped in a troublesome situation, and vague thoughts of disrupting their plan had sprung into his mind. However, they remained nothing more than thoughts for the moment. While they couldn't be considered to have a particularly close relationship, they could at least be considered acquaintances.

At that moment, the skeletal man at his side started to speak, "Since we've already received orders from our superiors, my brother and I would've participated regardless. Do you know where this woman appeared? Since we've gathered here, then she mustn't be too far away!"

"Fellow Daoist is right, the witch lives in seclusion on a desolate island north of Bright Emperor Island. When she went out to

purchase a few goods, one of our disciples happened to recognize her and followed her back to the island. Up until that moment, we didn't have the slightest idea about where she could be. This woman is extremely cunning and she possesses treasures with tremendous might, not to mention our sect's precious Azure Flameblasts. As such, everyone should take proper care." When the old man gave his warning, he spoke towards Han Li especially. Since Han Li was a late Core Formation cultivator, the old man held him in even higher regard than the others.

But against their wildest imaginations, while Han Li was expressionlessly nodding his head, he was inwardly pondering whether or not he should exterminate them. However, when Han Li heard that Yuan Yao was located nearby and that she had many precious treasures on hand, his heart stirred. After a mere moment of thought, Han Li decided that after he saved her, he would take the opportunity to demand heavy rewards from her.

With the explanation completed, Ke Yu finished examining the people in the room and respectfully asked them for confirmation that they understood before setting off from the cave.

...

Somewhere else in the Inner Seas a cultivator with disheveled hair glanced down at the transportation formation under his feet with confusion. The transportation had been flickering with light when he had entered, but once he was about to teleport, the formation had lost power for some unfathomable reason. This caused him to gloomily rub the back of his head; he was at a loss of what to do.

...

Leaving behind the people guarding the formations, Han Li and the party arrived on the side of a mountain. In the distance, a village could vaguely be seen. The party of five then took to the skies and under the guidance of the Azure Yang Sect Elder, they

left the island and flew north.

The flight was uneventful and the party flew in silence. With Han Li's detached and withdrawn mannerisms, none dared to tactlessly chat along the way as he possessed the highest cultivation among them.

About half a day later, the group of five spotted a small island about ten kilometers wide ahead of them.

A cold light flickered within the old man's eyes as he came to a stop, and coolly said, "This is the place. The witch should be hiding inside one of the hills."

Han Li and the others soon came to a stop and gazed at the island in the distance. Apart from some sparse vegetation, there were only a few small stone mountains and the spiritual Qi was extremely scarce.

After taking a look at the island, the fiendish man couldn't help but doubtfully ask, "Fellow Daoist Ding, are you not mistaken? The witch is a Core Formation cultivator. Why would she cultivate in a place like this?"

"Be at ease, there is no way our info is wrong." The old man surnamed Ding replied with complete confidence. He then formed his hands into an incantation gesture and flung his hand out, causing a streak of bright yellow light to streak across the sky.

A short moment later, a burst of yellow radiance suddenly shone from one side of the island.

The old man was happy after seeing this, and hastily turned his head to the other three and explained, "One of our sects' disciples remained here to monitor the woman. It seems that she has yet to leave the island."

After that was said, they waited for a moment more before a streak of red light approached them from the direction of the yellow light. A moment later, the red streak of light arrived in

front of them and faded away to reveal a grey-clothed mid Foundation Establishment cultivator that appeared to be about forty years old. His robes were identical to the old man's robes with azure flame emblems embroidered into them, but the flames were far smaller than those on the old man's robes.

When the man recognized old man Ding, he hastily bowed to him and respectfully said, "Disciple greets Martial Uncle Ding and Seniors!"

The old man waved off his greeting without paying it any attention and asked in a deep voice, "Is the witch still on the island?"

"She is still there. The witch has yet to leave ever since this disciple tailed her back to this island." The middle-aged man spoke with certainty.

The old man spoke with a deep tone, "Good, you've done well in your assignment. When this matter is over, you will be promoted to an inner disciple within the sect. Go ahead and lead the way."

When the middle-aged man heard this, he had a rapt smile as he repeatedly thanked the old man. He then turned around and flew to the small island.

In the blink of an eye, the party arrived above the small island. The middle-aged man then pointed to a stone mountain and respectfully said, "On the witch's return, this disciple saw her approach that mountain and then disappear without a trace. Although I couldn't investigate closer due to my low cultivation, I reckon that woman's cave residence is inside that mountain."

When the skeletal man heard that, a strange light flickered within his eyes as he gazed at the mountain. He then slowly nodded his head and said, "That's right. The mountain's exterior is clearly under the effects of high level restrictions. Unless one were to examine that particular mountain up close, they wouldn't be able to discover anything strange about the island. It is no wonder

why the woman was able to conceal herself here for so many years.”

Chapter 563: Getting Ahead

After hearing the skeletal man's description of the formation, a scowl momentarily appeared on the old man's face. "Humph! That woman stole all of the young master's technique records during that day, so it isn't strange for her to be able to do this. After I break through the spell formations, I will have to trouble you Fellow Daoists to assist me."

"Relax, even if the woman possesses exceptional powers, it is still impossible for her to escape." The skeletal man smiled and spoke with a careless expression.

The old man agreed and clutched his hands in an incantation gesture as a blinding yellow radiance suddenly erupted from his hands. "Break!" As the old man shouted, the yellow radiance left his hands and struck the mountains down below.

The blast produced a rumble that echoed throughout the air. The scene of the mountain began to ripple in a manner similar to a large rock suddenly dropping into a serene pond. With a ripple of white light, the scene underwent a massive change, revealing beautiful, verdant mountain along with massive fluctuations of spiritual Qi.

"This is?" The skeletal and fiendish man gazed at the scene in astonishment and couldn't help becoming dazed with their mouths gaping open.

Old man Ding swept his gaze past the two and proudly said, "Hehe, this is my sect's secret Spirit Constraining Formation. It is one of the only spell formations in the world capable of concealing spiritual Qi. That witch's cultivation is insufficient and she was only capable of concealing a portion of the spiritual Qi. If our own Martial Ancestor were to personally place down this formation, it would be easy for him to prevent it from leaking even a trace of spiritual Qi."

Han Li was astonished by this as well, and his heart stirred after hearing the old man's explanation. If he could acquire the method for creating the Spirit Constraining Formation, his cave residences in the future would be far safer.

Following the disappearance of the illusion formation, a stone gate was revealed by a pulse of green light at the center of the mountain. It seemed to indicate the location of Yuan Yao's cave residence.

"Let's begin our attack." A malicious glint appeared in the old man's eyes.

The skeletal man nodded and shot out a strange black edge from his mouth. The weapon was rather odd, appearing to be half saber and half sword. As for the fierce man, he let out a roar and hurled a halberd with an ominous, cold aura towards the mountain. Han Li was shocked to see such a massive weapon being used as a magic treasure. Such a weapon was a rare sight indeed amongst cultivators.

The old man had personally spat a white flying sword out of his mouth with a shout. But when he saw that Han Li had yet to take action, he couldn't help but be puzzled and ask, "Fellow Daoist, why haven't you..."

Han Li faintly smiled and was about to casually make up an excuse when the mountain door suddenly opened, and a green light burst out from within.

When the old man saw this, he wasn't able to say anything further. All the other cultivators' attention had been captured by the sudden change.

The green light revolved in front of the gate once before fading away to reveal a black-robed woman who possessed striking beauty and skin as fair as snow. The woman smiled with luminous, moist eyes, and her every movement seemed to contain a trace of charm. This was obviously Yuan Yao, who had parted ways with Han Li

after leaving Heavenvoid Hall.

He hadn't seen the woman for many years, but not only did her appearance remain the same, her charms seemed to possess an even deeper degree of allure.

When the woman swept her gaze across the people there, her expression immediately changed upon seeing the Azure Yang Sect's elder. A layer of frost suddenly seemed to cover her face.

Knowing that her charm techniques would be of no use to the cultivators before her, Yuan Yao's expression quickly grew unsightly. She turned her gaze away from the old man as if in contempt and icily said, "Why have you Fellow Daoists arrived at this little woman's residence?"

When old man Ding saw this, he grew furious in his heart, but as he was a gloomy and shrewd sort, none of it was revealed on his face. Instead, he sinisterly smiled and said, "Witch, there is no point in feigning ignorance. You killed my sect's young master and took his treasures. Do you still believe you can escape?"

Yuan Yao didn't bother to respond to the old man, choosing to examine the other cultivators instead. As a result, she felt her heart sink.

The old man and the fiendish man were only early Core Formation cultivators such as herself. However, the skeletal black-robed man and the azure robed man with the unremarkable appearance would be quite difficult to deal with. Their cultivations were at mid and late Core Formation, respectively.

Despite the astonishing power of the several magic treasures in her possession and the few secret techniques that she had cultivated over the years, if those four were to join hands, the results would be far from good.

The skeletal man and the fiendish man were clearly shocked when they saw Yuan Yao's beauty, and gave each other a mutual

glance of regret. If the woman hadn't offended the Azure Yang Sect's Venerable Devil Three Yang, she would've definitely been an ideal Dao companion. It was truly a pity.

As she confronted the dire circumstances before her, her expression remained steady as she bitterly laughed and waved her empty hand. A white light started to revolve around her hand and when she stroked it, it started to brightly shine and release a large expanse of green and yellow mist. In a mere second, the mist covered the entire mountain.

When the old man saw this, he shouted and the flying sword in front of him hastily chopped towards Yuan Yao.

However, Yuan Yao merely laughed and silently disappeared into the mist with a blur.

The old man frowned when he saw this. Then with an expression of disdain, he clutched his hands in an incantation gesture and pointed at his flying sword. "Humph! You dare to display a trifling illusion formation in front of me?!"

The flying sword released a clear ring before wildly twirling through the skies. In an instant, it turned into a ten-meter-long disc of whirling light that ruthlessly swept past the mountain and cleanly scattered the fog. A second later, the stone gate could be seen once more.

When the fiendish man saw this, he pointed to his own magic treasure without the slightest hesitation and caused the halberd to swell in size several times before fiercely chopping at the stone gate. Flashes of yellow and green light erupted each time the halberd struck the gate.

To Han Li's side, the skeletal man was about to send his own strange blade to attack when he suddenly shouted in shock, "Not good! The witch ran from the back of the mountain. Quickly, chase after her!" He then turned into a streak of black light and quickly flew around the mountain.

When Han Li heard this, a strange expression flickered within his eyes, but he stood in place without moving.

It appeared the fiendish man was extremely confident in the skeletal man's words. He immediately stopped attacking the gate after hearing his words and set off after him.

When the old man saw this, he wore a doubtful expression and hesitantly asked Han Li, "Fellow Daoist, did he speak truly? This old man didn't sense anything."

When Han Li heard him, his face remained unchanged but an odd expression flickered within his eyes as he calmly said, "That Fellow Daoist spoke truthfully, she did flee from an exit on the other side of the mountain. Those two Fellow Daoists have already barred her way and are in the middle of a battle with her." Han Li's arms were held behind his back as he gazed into the distance.

The old man joyfully said, "That is great! If we arrive to assist them, we will certainly be able to capture that witch."

Han Li turned towards the old man and gazed at him with a peculiar expression as he leisurely said, "Yes, if we were to head out, that woman would be easily captured. But before that, there is something I'd like to borrow from you."

Old man Ding appeared perplexed and paused for a moment before asking, "Borrow? What does Fellow Daoist wish to borrow from me?"

"Nothing important. Just your head!" Han Li rubbed his nose with a smirk. Then before the old man could respond, he spat a streak of bright azure light from his mouth. It circled once around the old man before his head tumbled off of his body.

Soon after, Han Li shot out a streak of azure light from his hand, wrapping up the head and dragging it into his hand. He then narrowed his eyes and enveloped the azure light around the head.

Because he had acted so quickly, the head still wore an expression

of a strange bewilderment and had yet to even smell of blood.

Han Li sighed and muttered, “Don’t blame me. Blame the terrible luck you had for seeing me arrive through the transportation formation.”

When Ke Yu and the Azure Yang Sect sentry saw this, they were immediately terrified and tried to hastily flee on their magic tools. Unfortunately for them, a casual wave of Han Li’s arm released two streaks of sword light that immediately penetrated their chests.

He then raised his head and turned to the direction of the mountain while wearing a strange expression.

Han Li clicked his tongue and said with an impressed tone, “I didn’t expect for Yuan Yao’s cultivation to have reached such a higher level!” He then flew off in a streak of azure light.

In the sky behind the green mountain, the skeletal man and the fiendish man were in a contest using their magic treasures against a strange red hammer as they continuously cast magic techniques in Yuan Yao’s direction. At that moment, Yuan Yao was completely enveloped in a cloud of black smoke and shot over a hundred streaks of green devilfire, intercepting their magic techniques with rings of explosions.

But as she fought, she continuously retreated and attempted to think of a plan to flee. As her opponents were rich with battle experience, their perfectly coordinated strikes forced Yuan Yao to focus the entirety of her attention on defending against their attacks.

When the fiendish man and the skeletal man saw Han Li flying over, they were overjoyed.

When Han Li arrived near the battle and his light faded away, the fiendish man appeared discontent and hastily called out to Han Li, “Fellow Daoist, quickly help! If we attack together, the woman will

be captured without fail. Wait, where is Fellow Daoist Ding? This was a matter of his own sect, how could he possibly delay?”

“You don’t need to wait for him. Fellow Daoist Ding is right here!” Han Li then expressionlessly reached behind him and tossed the old man’s head to the fiendish man.

Chapter 564: A Gift

After hearing Han Li's tone suddenly turn harsh, the fiendish man felt that something was amiss. When he saw Han Li had tossed over a severed head, he felt his heart drop but he unconsciously blurred forward to catch it. In the same instant he moved forward, he clearly saw the severed head's face. He felt his heart quake upon realizing that the pale severed head belonged to Old Man Ding.

The skeletal man was similarly aghast when he saw that it was the head of Old Man Ding. With great coordination, the two quickly drew close to one another the instant they discovered the situation had gone awry. They then commanded their magic treasures to return to them before staring at Han Li with vigilant expressions.

Although Han Li was a late Core Formation cultivator, if the two of them joined hands, they could possibly rival him. As a result, they didn't appear to possess the slightest fear.

Not far away, Yuan Yao was watching all of this unfold in utter confusion. Despite not using the opportunity to escape, she still maintained the devilish technique that surrounded her body and had her strange red hammer revolve around her out of caution as she silently observed the strange actions of Han Li and the others.

Han Li shot a deep glance at Yuan Yao before turning his gaze back to the skeletal man and the fiendish man. Without offering any further explanation, he waved both his arms with a faint smile and over twenty small azure swords flew out from his sleeves like two schools of fish. Then in a sudden burst of light, the flying swords shot directly at the pair of cultivators.

When the skeletal man and the fiendish man saw this, they couldn't believe their eyes and had incredulous expressions on their faces.

Ordinary Core Formation cultivators had to exhaust most of their fortune just to refine a single magic treasure, and now this traitorous ally before them had suddenly took out over twenty flying swords. With this single display, the two immediately knew that Han Li was no ordinary late Core Formation cultivator, and didn't stand a chance against him.

The skeletal man's expression paled and he suddenly yelled, "Scatter! To each his own!"

Just as he finished yelling, he transformed into a black streak of light and flew away. Upon hearing this, the fiendish man immediately retrieved his halbard without another word and rushed away in the opposite direction. His speed wasn't much slower than his partner's. He seemed to be exceptionally proficient in running away.

When Han Li saw this, his expression grew solemn, and he quickly formed an incantation gesture with both his hands before pointing to his flying swords. The swords then glowed with azure light before each sword produced three identical swordlights, transforming the original twenty four swords into ninety-six and doubling the strength of each of their auras. Han Li then flung his sleeve and imposingly uttered, "Separate."

As soon as the word was uttered the azure swords split off in two groups. Each group of flying swords then united together with a pulse of azure light and formed their own distinct swarms of light before swiftly setting off.

Han Li's use of the divine ability [Swordshadow Phantasm Technique](#) left the skeletal man and the fiendish man deathly white when they turned their heads around to look. They then began to circulate the entirety of the magic powers in their bodies while fearing for their lives.

Han Li stood still and merely glanced at the two with a trace of pity. The swarms of swordlights traveled at a speed that ordinary

cultivators couldn't hope to match. Unless they had heaven-defying treasures similar to Han Li's blood-red cloak or Thunderstorm Wings, the two of them didn't have the slightest chance of survival.

After only a short moment, the swarms of swordlight had traveled several kilometers away and chased down the skeletal man and the fiendish man. They could only helplessly turn around and summon their magic treasures in an attempt to block the sword swarms. But under the overbearing assault of their superior numbers, the swords tore their bodies apart in quick succession, each death accompanied by a miserable scream.

Han Li then calmly released the Swordshadow Phantasm Technique, and had the swords fly back with the now ownerless storage pouches.

With the swords flying back into his robes like birds returning to their nest, Han Li turned to look at the black mist in the distance with a mysterious smile.

To his surprise, before he even spoke Yuan Yao giggled and said, "So it's Fellow Daoist Han. I didn't expect that in the tens of years we were apart Brother Han's abilities would reach this stage. This little woman truly holds you in great esteem!" Soon after she said this, the black mist slowly dispersed to reveal the stunningly beautiful woman. She then silently gazed at Han Li with luminous eyes and a wide smile.

"I didn't expect for Fellow Daoist Yuan to recognize me. You gave me quite the fright!" Han Li chuckled and then dissolved his appearance exchange arts without hesitation, restoring his original appearance in a flash of white light.

"I, myself, find it quite difficult to believe that apart from Brother Han, there could be another person in the Scattered Star Seas that also possesses such a vast number of flying sword magic treasures." Although she had said those earlier words with a smile,

she still let out a breath of relief after seeing Han Li reveal his true appearance. Then after a moment of hesitation, she refrained from asking why Han Li had appeared here; instead, she approached Han Li and gracefully saluted him, expressing her sincere gratitude, “It is thanks to Brother Han’s timely rescue that this little woman was able to escape calamity.”

She truly understood that if Han Li had meant her harm, she wouldn’t have even been given the opportunity to flee given his current cultivation. As such, it would be far better if she could forge a friendly relationship with him.

Han Li naturally knew why Yuan Yao had showed him respect with such a strong smile. As such, he chuckled and waved his arm before saying, “I merely happened to encounter this hunting party by chance, and saving you only required very slight effort. Since we last saw each other, it seems Fellow Daoist Yuan has made quite a bit of progress with her techniques.”

Yuan Yao tilted her head and glanced at Han Li before speaking with feigned anger, “Is Brother Han making fun of this little woman? Brother Han has already reached late Core Formation stage while I am still lingering at early Core Formation stage. What progress is there to speak of?”

“Hehe! Fellow Daoist Yuan is far too modest. Although I’ve managed to reach this stage with the assistance of many chance encounters, there are still several matters that I must consult with you about.”

Yuan Yao was momentarily stunned before concealing a giggle with her hand. “Hehe! Ask as you please, but if Brother Han doesn’t find my humble home distasteful, wouldn’t it be better to have our chat there?” The woman treated Han Li with obvious intimacy, perhaps due to him having just saved her life.

Without putting on any airs, Han Li saluted her and agreed, “Then I will have to trouble you to lead the way!”

Yuan Yao's complexion flushed and she descended onto the island with a smile on her face as Han Li followed her into her cave residence.

Yuan Yao's cave residence couldn't be considered very large, but it was tastefully arranged in an elegant and clean manner. Additionally, the residence's passageways were lined with rare and colorful plants, filling the ordinarily dull cave residence with color and a pleasant fragrance.

When Han Li saw this, he couldn't help but warmly smile as Yuan Yao led Han Li into a stone hall over thirty meters wide. After Han Li took a seat at the table, she steeped a pot of fragrant tea and happily sat across from Han Li.

"Brother Han is quite famous within the Scattered Star Seas; you've acquired quite the reputation. Nearly everyone has heard of how the top ranked secret treasure in the Scattered Star Seas fell into the hands of a Core Formation cultivator surnamed Han. Judging by how Fellow Daoist entered late Core Formation in so few years, could it be that you have consumed the legendary Heavenmend Pill? Is the medicine truly as miraculous as the legends say?" As soon as Yuan Yao sat down, she revealed an unconcealed longing towards both the Heavenmend Pill and the Heavenvoid Cauldron.

Han Li paused for a moment before silently smiling, the woman was quite clever. She clearly had taken the opportunity to raise the matter of the Heavenvoid Cauldron and the Heavenmend pill without showing any hostile intentions. Han Li couldn't help but feel favorable towards her.

Han Li sighed and shook his head, "Since Fellow Daoist Yuan mentioned it, I won't try to fool you. The Heavenvoid Cauldron really is in my possession. However, due to my shallow cultivation, I've been unable to open the cauldron ever since I acquired it. Whatever treasures it contains are completely inaccessible to me for the time being. By the time my cultivation progresses and I

have the ability to open it, the Heavenmend Pill will no longer be of any use to me.” Since his cultivation far exceeded her own, he didn’t feel the need to lie and calmly revealed the truth of the matter.

“You’ve yet to open the Heavenvoid Cauldron?” When Yuan Yao heard this, she paused for a moment, before revealing an expression of slight disbelief.

Han Li frowned and was disinclined to offer the woman any further explanation. Instead, he coughed several times and decided to clearly strike at the heart of the matter at hand. He stared at Yuan Yao and slowly said, “Would Fellow Daoist Yuan happen to have any more Myriad Spirit Milk on her? You should know that with the Heavenvoid Cauldron in my possession, trouble has a way of constantly finding me. This along with many other unexpected matters has caused me to consume nearly all the Myriad Year Spirit Milk that you gave me. If you have any of it remaining, I am willing to pay a high price for it. You definitely won’t suffer a loss.”

Han Li would have lost his life several times over during his time in the Outer Star Seas, were it not for the Myriad Year Spirit Milk. After realizing just how important this item was, Han Li was naturally unwilling to let go an opportunity to acquire the other half of the spirit milk originally in the bottle. With this, he would have yet another life saving item the next time danger came to seek him out.

When Yuan Yao heard Han Li, she paused for a moment before unconsciously frowning.

A moment later, she took out a jade bottle from her waist and placed it at the center of the table and pushed it towards Han Li without any hesitation.

The woman serenely gazed at Han Li and said, “I haven’t used even a drop of the Myriad Year Spirit Milk. Brother Han can have

it as a gift, so there is no need to give me any spirit stones or items for it.”

[First introduced in Chapter 217. It is a technique that allows swords to produce an illusory copy of themselves. At his current strength, each of the sword illusions are able to retain one-third of the power of the original weapon.]

Chapter 565: The Other Side of the Story

“You’re giving the Myriad Year Spirit Milk to me as a gift?” Han Li was astonished upon hearing her.

“That’s right! Although the Myriad Year Spirit Milk could be considered extremely precious, it cannot be compared with Brother Han’s life-saving rescue. Could it be that Brother Han believes that I am the sort of woman who doesn’t know how to repay kindness?” Yuan Yao bit her lip as she started to twirl a fine strand of hair around her finger.

Han Li was hesitant as he said, “No, it’s just...”

When Yuan Yao heard this, her eyes brightened and she smiled, “We are fellow survivors of Heavenvoid Hall, and now you’ve saved my life once again. There is no need for Brother Han to address me as an outsider and always call me ‘Fellow Daoist’.” Yuan Yao chuckled after saying this, but she soon thought of something and a blush appeared on her face, emphasizing her beauty.

When Han Li saw her captivating expression, he couldn’t help but blankly stare at her for a time.

Yuan Yao’s blush deepened when she saw Han Li staring at her, turned her head to the side as if to avoid his gaze.

A while later, Han Li took a deep breath and said, “Since Miss Yuan Yao has said this, I won’t act so unfamiliar and will call you by your esteemed name.”

He then casually picked up the small bottle and opened it to see that it was truly the Myriad Year Spirit Milk.

With a trace of joy, Han Li placed the bottle into his storage pouch. Then after some slight hesitation, Han Li took out two small, white jade bottles and pushed them towards Yuan Yao.

Yuan Yao blinked and said with slight confusion, “What are

those?”

Han Li calmly replied, “These two bottles contain medicine pills for progressing one’s magic power, and will assuredly aid you in your future cultivation. Consider them as an exchange of gifts.”

Yuan Yao paused for a moment and then pursed her lips in a smile as she looked at the two white jade bottles, “I’ve already said that the spirit milk was a present to you, but Brother Han still took out two bottles of medicine pills to give me. You’re making me quite embarrassed.”

Han Li glanced at her and smiled before saying, “There is no need for Miss Yuan to feel embarrassed! These two bottles of medicine pills were refined from the cores of grade six demon beasts. With Miss Yuan’s current cultivation at the peak of early Core formation stage, these pills will allow you to smoothly enter the mid Core Formation stage.”

Yuan Yao’s smile suddenly turned into an expression of shock, “Medicine pills refined from grade six demon cores?”

She immediately grabbed a bottle and opened the lid. Pure spiritual Qi was released from the bottle, much to Yuan Yao’s delighted surprise.

Yuan Yao’s hand tightly held onto the bottle and said in an embarrassed manner, “I could refuse anything else, but due to desperation, I’m afraid that this little woman will have to shamefully accept these two bottles of medicine pills.”

The two bottles of medicine pills would save Yuan Yao over ten years of bitter cultivation, so although she felt slightly embarrassed, she was still very much delighted.

“Please, don’t hesitate to take them. I still have other things to request of you.” Han Li felt relief after seeing Yuan Yao take the medicine pills. Otherwise, he would’ve found it difficult to put forward his next request.

After carefully putting away the two bottles, Yuan Yao felt even more relaxed towards Han Li, and her expression only grew more lovely. “With Brother Han’s current powers, what could Brother Han possibly require from this little woman? Let me know and I will certainly help if I can.”

Han Li slowly said, “Just now I was amazed when I saw the Azure Yang Sect’s secret Spirit Constraining Formation; it was able to restrain the spiritual Qi surrounding your cave residence. Would Miss Yuan be able to give me a copy of the method to create this formation spell? I would be extremely grateful.”

“The Spirit Constraining Formation? Not a problem.” Perhaps wishing to repay Han Li for the medicine pills, Yuan Yao instantly agreed without the slightest consideration. She immediately took out a jet-black jade slip and handed it to Han Li.

Yuan Yao sweetly smiled in a breathtaking display of her dainty charms, “This jade slip contains the formation spell records of the Azure Yang Sect. In addition to the Spirit Constraining Formation, there are several other powerful spell formations as well.”

Han Li was elated to accept the jade slip and uttered several words of thanks before immersing his spiritual sense in it. Just as Yuan Yao had said, there were several spell formations that he had never heard of in addition to the Spirit Constraining Formation.

After quickly looking through the contents, Han Li withdrew his spiritual sense from the jade slip with a satisfied expression. When he thought to say something to Yuan Yao, he was surprised to see that she appeared to be hesitant about whether or not she should speak.

With a trace of doubt on his face, Han Li asked, “Is there something you want to ask me, Miss Yuan?”

Yuan Yao hesitated before revealing an expression of determination, and calmly asked, “Since Brother Han already knows about the Azure Yang Sect, then you should also know a bit

about my past, yes?”

A bewildered expression appeared on Han Li's face at the sudden change of topic. Not knowing why she has raised the issue, he indifferently nodded and sullenly said, “That's right. When I infiltrated their group, I heard the Azure Yang Sect elder say that you had nearly become the young sect master's concubine. Afterwards, you killed the young master in secret and fled with his treasures. Is that true?”

When she heard Han Li's brief summary, a bitter smile appeared on Yuan Yao's beautiful face. With a mocking tone, she said, “He wasn't wrong. I really did nearly become that wretch's concubine, and I did it with the intention of gaining the Azure Yang Sect as a powerful backer. Do you believe that my actions displayed a lack of pride or honor, Brother Han?”

Han Li shook his head and emotionlessly said, “Not in the slightest. That's just how the cultivation world works. If you aren't born into a large sect or if you lack exceptional spiritual roots, it's extremely difficult to progress on the path of cultivation! That being the case, your methods are basically par for the course. Most beautiful female cultivators are more than willing to become the concubine or servant of high grade male cultivators in the hopes of acquiring support. There are even a few female cultivators that have given up on cultivation completely and become cultivation furnaces for others, merely looking for a period of luxury free of worry.”

Han Li's words seemed to make Yuan Yao feel more at ease. She then forced a smile at Han Li and said, “[Senior Martial Sister Yan Li](#) and I were both born in a small cultivation sect. Not only were our aptitudes only average, but our cultivation techniques were mediocre as well. We both realized if things continued like they were, we wouldn't even catch a glimpse of Foundation Establishment stage, let alone Core Formation. As a result, we both agreed to leave our sect and wanted to find an unmarried male

cultivator with profound cultivation in hopes of becoming their Dao companion. Unfortunately, we never encountered a suitable high grade cultivator, not even one at late Foundation Establishment stage. Instead, our beauty attracted many undesirables like flies to fruit, but since their cultivations weren't superior to our own, we were unwilling to devote our hearts to them.

“Later on, due to a few unforeseen events, Senior Martial Sister Yan Li and I parted ways for a time. Several years later when I reunited with her, I discovered that she had become the cultivation furnace for the Azure Yang Sect's young master. I was shocked and furious at the time and wanted to investigate it, but at that moment, the Azure Yang Sect's young master suddenly appeared and started to repeatedly say how attracted he was to me and how he wanted me to be his concubine. I accepted his terms on the condition that he release Senior Martial Sister Yan Li and also wed her as a concubine. But during those years, I was young and short sighted. Based on the wretch's illustrious identity, deep cultivation, and great riches, I agreed without much consideration despite the protests of my Senior Martial Sister.”

At this point Yuan Yao wore a dazed expression as if she were lost in her memories of that year.

Han Li slightly furled his brow, but knowing that she was about to continue, he silently waited.

After Yuan Yao woke from her daze, her voice grew icy as she continued, “On our way back to the Azure Yang Sect, Senior Martial Sister Yan Li found an opportunity to secretly tell me that she had originally been duped by the Azure Yang Sect's young master. She had also been promised to be wed as a concubine, but she had instead become the wretch's cultivation furnace several months later and was greatly sapped of her strength. It seemed that most of his cultivation vessels had been cheated in nearly the same way. After they entered the Azure Yang Sect, these female

cultivators that were promised to be concubines had all become cultivation vessels and were stripped of their freedom. When I heard that, I became fearful and began to consult with Senior Martial Sister about taking advantage of the wretch when he was unguarded to stealthily dispose of him, but who could've known that this ravenous wretch wished to consummate our marriage before we even managed to return to the sect? Helpless, my Senior Martial Sister and I could only lay down a trap and take advantage of his moment of weakness.

“In the end, the plan succeeded. However, my Senior Martial Sister Yan Li suffered an immense injury and lost her body. All I could do for her was take her primal soul and temporarily house it in a magic tool, but ordinary ghost magic tools cause the soul to decay within only days. Later on, I used all the techniques I could to slow this degradation but I was never able to stop it. Soon, Senior Martial Sister Yan Li's primal soul was at risk of losing her intelligence, and being forever incapable of bonding with a body.”

Having heard this, Han Li's eyes brightened as he recalled the matter of the Spirit Nurturing Wood. “Could it be that you acquired the Soul Nurturing Wood in order to protect Fellow Daoist Yan Li's soul?”

Yan Li first appeared in chapter 375. She was the dainty woman who accompanied Yuan Yao.

Chapter 566 Soulrise Technique

When Yuan Yao answered Han Li's question, her face revealed a hopeful expression, "That's right. I had acquired a jade slip from the Azure Yang Sect's young master that described the Soul Nurturing Wood contained inside Heavenvoid Hall. As such, I prepared myself to go to the Heavenvoid Hall with intention of acquiring the divine wood. However, I didn't expect that it would be far more dangerous than the legends made it out to be. Were it not for your assistance on several occasions, I fear I wouldn't have made it out of Heavenvoid Hall as I had only recently entered Core Formation at the time. Senior Martial Sister Yan Li's primal soul mostly recovered her strength at this point, after being nourished by the Soul Nurturing Wood for so many years. Although she can't possess a body of her own accord, she can still possess a different fleshly body with the Soulrise Technique."

Han Li's expression slightly changed when he heard this, "Soulrise Technique? Is that a type of technique which draws the soul into a fresh corpse and brings it back to life?"

"That's right."

Han Li stared at the woman and imposingly said, "Fellow Daoist Yuan, do you know what you're trying to do? Not to mention the danger when using this technique, but the cost of using such a technique is more than an ordinary cultivator can bear. Not only does one's cultivation need to be at least at Core Formation to use this technique, but due to its heaven defying nature, it will also subject your cultivation to unbearable strain. As an early Core Formation cultivator, it's very likely that you will shatter your core upon using the technique and drop down back to Foundation Establishment stage."

When Yuan Yao heard Han Li's warning, she grew silent for a moment before playing it down by saying, "Of course I know all of that. When possessing a living person's body, so long as one didn't

violate the three inviolable laws, it's a relatively safe matter. Since the Soulrise technique is fundamentally different from possession and causes a fresh corpse to revive, it naturally possesses a high cost."

A trace of spirited light appeared within Han Li's eyes, and he solemnly warned, "With the aid of the Soul Nurturing Wood, why can't your Senior Martial Sister take the initiative to possess a body? Can't you just wait until after reaching the mid Core Formation stage before using the Soulrise Technique on your Senior Martial Sister? If you try to form another core after having it shattered, it's so incredibly difficult that it could be considered nearly impossible."

Yuan Yao calmly replied, "Senior Martial Sister suffered far too heavy an injury and has existed as a soul for far too long. Her consciousness has already started to dim and it isn't something that the Soul Nurturing Wood is capable of blocking. She only has one or two years at most before she thoroughly loses her sense of self. If I were to wait until then to use the Soulrise Technique, she would only be a mindless husk. And just as it so happens, I recently came across a very suitable fresh corpse and have already spent a lot of effort into laying down the spell formation for the Soulrise Technique. Had no one disturbed me, I would've begun the ritual in the coming month." Although a slight trace of sorrow could be seen on her face, she appeared determined.

Having heard this, a strange emotion flickered within Han Li's eyes. A short moment later, he let out a breath and asked, "Did Miss Yuan say this with the intention of asking me for help?"

Yuan Yao wore a resolute expression with wide eyes. "Brother Han just saved me a moment ago, so it would be improper for me ask you for assistance. However, the Soulrise Technique requires a place of profound Yin, and will produce effects that spell formations cannot conceal that will attract the attention of other cultivators. Because I was branded a criminal by the Azure Yang

Sect, I have been unable to acquaint myself with any other high grade cultivators apart from you. I can only hope that you'll stay for the next few days and offer this little woman some protection as she employs the ritual. As this matter relates to the life or death of my Senior Martial Sister Yan Li, I will agree to any conditions I am able to so long as you agree."

Han Li grew silent for a moment with a pensive expression. According to how he would ordinarily act, he wouldn't even consider staying behind. He had his own share of troubles and couldn't afford to take on anyone else's. However, Yuan Yao wouldn't hesitate to shatter her own core if it meant she could save her good friend. This touching act had stirred up emotions that Han Li had kept locked away deep within his heart.

After a moment of deliberation, he came to the conclusion that so long as he didn't encounter any mid Nascent Soul stage cultivators, he wouldn't be in any danger at his current cultivation. If any ordinary cultivators were to spy on what was happening, he would be able to easily exterminate them. If all he had to do was protect the woman for a few days, then it wouldn't take much effort on his part.

With that thought, Han Li came to a decision and rubbed his nose. He wryly smiled and said, "It seems I don't have a heart of stone after all, because for some reason I just can't refuse you. Since you're even willing to shatter your own core, I will assist you in raising Miss Yan Li's soul, and will act as your protector just this once! I require no other conditions aside from you having to tell me what is amiss with the Weeping Soul Pearl. I have felt apprehensive about refining the treasure ever since you mentioned it. Also, the place of profound Yin isn't be on this island, yes? This place has already been exposed, so it would be a very good idea to conduct the ritual elsewhere."

When Yuan Yao heard Han Li's response, her beauty appeared to blossom as she wore a thankful expression. She then took out a

green jade slip and handed it over to Han Li saying, “I am truly grateful for your assistance, Brother Han! However, please don’t worry. The place of profound Yin isn’t here, it’s on another island. Although it is only several days away, we should be safe from the Azure Yang Sect’s pursuit for more than enough time for me to conduct the ritual. As for the the matter of the Weeping Soul Pearl, it is quite simple. The Azure Yang Sect young master’s Weeping Soul Beast wasn’t completely refined. As such, the Weeping Soul Pearl used to control it is flawed. After refining it, one would periodically experience headaches. Additionally, once it is more deeply refined, the headaches would become far more severe. I merely refined it to less than half of completion in order to deal with the first trial of Heavenvoid Hall - the ghost mist, but it still left me restless and troubled. I also have the refinement technique for the Weeping Soul Beast itself. Although I believe that you won’t be able to finish refining it on your own, I will give it to you regardless.”

Han Li came to a sudden realization about why its power was so inferior to how the legends described. It turned out that his Weeping Soul Beast was a half finished product.

Han Li took the jade slip with slight disappointment and casually took a look inside before throwing it into his storage pouch.

Then with a bright expression, Han Li said, “Miss Yuan, since this place has already been revealed, we should immediately leave for the place of profound Yin to spare us from any potential troubles that may come this way.”

Yuan Yao paused for a moment before agreeing, “Yes! I would’ve proposed the same. I’ll quickly tend to my belongings before we depart.”

...

Three days later, Han Li was looking down at a small, barren island.

Han Li stroked his chin and turned to the beautiful woman at his side, asking, “The Yin Qi is truly dense on this island, so it must’ve been quite difficult for you to find it. Perhaps by drawing on the support of the immense Yin Qi, Miss Yuan won’t suffer much backlash when using the technique.”

Yuan Yao glanced at the island with a slight smile and said, “Of course. I only managed to find this nameless island after searching through the records of the nearby seas. Long ago, this island was a demon beast graveyard. Before humans had established themselves among the Scattered Star Seas, the nearby low grade demon beasts would approach this island of their own accord when they reached the end of the lifespan to die here. After countless years, the island has developed an astonishing amount of Yin Qi, but few know of it since this island is so far from commonly traveled routes and is quite small.”

With that said, the woman flew down without any further hesitation with Han Li calmly following after her.

After descending onto the edge of the island, Yuan Yao brought Han Li to a small, empty valley that was littered with fist-sized black stones.

When Yuan Yao arrived at the edge of the valley, she formed an incantation gesture with both hands and shot out a streak of red light. The valley then rippled with red light before revealing an extremely complicated spell formation that spanned over thirty meters. From the profound talisman characters contained within the formation pieces, its intricacy was obvious at a glance.

But what left Han Li surprised was the translucent coffin of white jade at its center. It was two meters long, a meter wide and a meter tall with streaks of white coiling around it. The entire coffin was actually made from glacial jade! Its price must’ve tremendous.

There was no doubt in Han Li’s mind about whether this glacial jade coffin contained the body that Yuan Yao intended for Yan Li.

To the best of Han Li's knowledge, the Soulrise Technique required several extremely specific conditions. Not only did it require a corpse with the same spiritual roots and age as the soul when it died, but the owner of the corpse must have suffered in the same manner as the soul did when they died. Even their grievances and resentful Qi had to be a perfect match! If any of these conditions weren't met, the Soulrise Technique couldn't be used!

As Han Li examined the coffin of glacial jade, Yuan Yao took out a black wood box from her robes with extreme care and placed it on the coffin before taking several steps back.

Chapter 567: Heavenly Omen

Yuan Yao looked at the sky before turning her head to Han Li. In a sincere tone, she said, “In four hours time, the Yin Qi will be at its strongest. That’s when I’ll begin to use the Soulrise Technique. The entire process will take three days so during that time, I will have to trouble you to guard me.”

Han Li nodded and looked around the valley. He frowned, asking, “Apart from the illusion formation, there seems to be nothing else. Won’t it be dangerous if a strong enemy were to fully occupy my attention and leave you vulnerable?”

Yuan Yao bit her lip and spoke with a hint of helplessness, “I know, but I don’t possess anymore powerful spell formation tools, and didn’t I have much time to prepare. So it’s a risk I have to take.”

Han Li crossed his arms and held his chin in his hand, before saying, “In that case, leave the spell formations to me! I still have a few sets of spell formation tools that hold decent strength. Although they are by no means exceptional, it’s still better than leaving you undefended.”

Since he had already decided to help, he may as well do his best!

When Yuan Yao heard him, her eyes shined delight as she said, “Brother Han, you’re proficient in the Dao of Formation Spells? Since that’s the case, I will feel much more at ease when I’m undergoing the ritual. Thank you for your troubles!”

Han Li silently smiled in return and then took off to the skies and examined the valley’s surroundings.

He slowly descended back onto the island a short moment later as he thought, ‘Since time is short, I should start putting down the formations right away!’

With that, Han Li began to wave his arms and produced slivers of

consciousness, summoning over a dozen huge ape puppets at his side. He then took out many sets of spell formation tools and handed them to the puppets. Han Li stood there and used his spiritual sense to control the puppets and had them start laying down formations around the valley.

Yuan Yao curiously gazed at the puppets' movements for a moment, but then began to hurriedly make her own preparations. The Soulrise Technique was no trivial affair! To fully employ the technique, it required extremely careful preparations. Additionally, one needed to test the formation on the ground to avoid any mistakes from occurring part way through.

Elsewhere on the island, Han Li managed to place down five moderately powerful spell formations within two hours with the aid of his ape puppets. Although they wouldn't be able to withstand persistent attacks from a Core Formation cultivator, they would be more than enough to deal with any Foundation Establishment cultivators.

At the heart of the valley, Yuan Yao finished placing down all of the spirit stones for the spell formation, and struck the crux of the formation with an incantation seal, activating the spell formation. In response, the spell formation began to hum and flicker with a jet-black light. Eerie strands of black Qi suddenly began to appear around the formation, converging towards the glacial jade coffin at the center.

Yuan Yao revealed satisfaction at the sight and hastily struck the formation with another incantation seal, stopping the spell formation.

Yuan Yao walked out of the spell formation and turned to Han Li, while happily saying, "There doesn't seem to be any problems. The spell formation is working as expected."

After seeing her cheerful smile, Han Li slowly said, "Fellow Daoist Yuan! Have you thought this through clearly? After

shattering your core, your path to immortal cultivation will cease. It will be nearly impossible to climb back up to Core Formation stage.”

Yuan Yao’s smile disappeared and after a brief moment of silence, she calmly said, “If it ends, then let it end. The only reason I was able to live until now was so I could accomplish this.” Yuan Yao then combed a strand of loose hair from her face to the side and emotionlessly said, “Brother Han doesn’t know what relationship I had with my Senior Martial Sister. I grew up with her ever since I was small and for tens of years, we lived together, ate together, and cultivated together in our sect. We may as well have been true sisters. When we killed the Azure Yang Young Sect Master, she blocked a retaliatory strike aimed at me and perished as result. As such, it is only right that I suffer from the Soulrise Technique for her. So long as Senior Martial Sister’s primal soul doesn’t perish and she regains her fleshly body, a shattered core is a trivial cost.”

An odd expression momentarily appeared on Han Li’s face. After muttering to himself for a moment, he nodded his head and no longer tried to dissuade her.

Yuan Yao returned to the center of the spell formation and sat down in front of the glacial jade coffin while waiting for the optimal time to start.

Not a word was spoken until she eventually looked at the skies and slowly stood up.

“It’s time. Let’s start! Regardless of whether or not the Soulrise Technique succeeds, I will always remember your kindness, Brother Han, and will be forever grateful.” Yuan Yao gracefully saluted Han Li before activating the formation beneath her without any reservations.

Han Li sighed and slowly walked out of the valley. A moment later, the surrounding Yin Qi began to flow towards the formation.

Even with his current cultivation, he didn't wish to be near such a vast quantity of Yin Qi.

Han Li stopped once he left the valley and turned around.

Yin winds began to gather around the spell formation and a faint layer of black light had begun to cover the area as ghostly wails filled the air.

Han Li then expressionlessly sat down outside the valley entrance and began to slowly release his spiritual sense, keeping the entire island and the nearby seas within his sights. As he remained motionless, he frowned and revealed a bitter smile.

At that moment, Han Li realized why Yuan Yao had requested him to act as her protector. Her previous description of the Soulrise Technique's external impact during the ritual was a vast understatement!

Han Li came back to his senses with something of a headache. The Yin winds had already obstructed most of the valley from view while sand and stones filled the air as they blew all over. Ghostly sobs reverberated throughout the valley. The heart of the formation was shining with blinding black light and was surrounded with Yin Qi so dense that the very sight of it inspired fear.

What Han Li found most shocking was the black cloud that had appeared five kilometers in the air at some unknown time. It roiled with Yin Qi and released startling claps of thunder as it started to take the form of a cone pointed downward at the valley.

This was clearly the sign of a heavenly omen. Any cultivators living in the nearby seas were certain to be shocked. After all, this astonishing scene wasn't normally accompanied by a treasure, but by a human performing a heretical act that defied the Heavens. Such a scene would arouse a great curiosity in anyone who saw it.

Furthermore, who knew whether or not this would provoke a

fearsome character?

As Han Li inwardly considered this, his expression stirred while he gazed into the distance.

Eight streaks of light were approaching the island from the southwest. In an instant, they had stopped five kilometers away from the island, revealing a group of male and female cultivators. They were led by an old grey-haired Foundation Establishment cultivator, while the rest of them were youths that were only at the eighth layer of Qi Condensation at most.

From their matching blue robes, they appeared to all be from the same sect.

The old man in charge gazed at the heavenly omen with a doubtful expression as his expression fluctuated.

A twenty year old female cultivator saw that the old man that was gazing at the island in silence and couldn't help but quickly propose, "Martial Uncle Zhao, let's quickly see what's happening on the island. Maybe a treasure has emerged!"

The old man glanced at the woman and rebuked her, "Hui Ling, you are far too rash. Look at the signs. Even if a treasure emerged here, it would be devilish and cursed. Moreover, it is quite possible that an expert is either refining something or employing a devilish technique. If you were to rush in there and cause disturbance, you'd only be seeking death."

The woman revealed a trace of dissatisfaction, but didn't dare to further speak.

One of the older male disciples glanced at the black clouds above the small island and asked, "Martial Uncle! What are we waiting around for?"

"Be at ease. With such a large disturbance, it's all but certain for others to be around. Action will only be taken after the situation is fully understood. Remember, our Grand Sun Sect has only lasted

until now due to the cautious discernment of its inner disciples. Never make any rash decisions. Even with such potentially gargantuan profits before us, we must also consider whether or not we can preserve our lives.” The old man lectured the disciples behind him as he stared at the small island.

The rest of the young disciples naturally agreed.

Not long after the old man spoke, a green and a yellow streak of light approached the island from a different direction. They discovered the old man’s party and stopped about three hundred meters away from them.

The light faded away to reveal a black-robed man that appeared about forty years of age with a stiff face, and an elegant woman beside him that appeared to be in her late twenties. With a pleasant voice, the woman warmly asked the old man, “So it’s the Grand Sun Sect’s Fellow Daoist Zhao. Do you know what is going on at the island? Why has a heavenly omen appeared?”

Chapter 568: A Frightful Retreat

The old man surnamed Zhao seemed to recognize the two and immediately smiled before replying, “So it turned out to be the Mei siblings! This old man was travelling nearby with his sect members when he saw that an astonishing change had occurred on an island in the distance. As a result, we only just arrived here. You siblings seem to be quite experienced, do you see anything strange about the heavenly omen?”

The woman politely replied, “Brother Zhao must be joking. If you don’t know about the heavenly omen, then how are my brother and I supposed to? However, it seems to be intertwined with quite a bit of Yin Qi. I suspect that an extremely vicious and evil treasure is being brought into this world!” As for the man by her side, he merely nodded in a detached manner.

The old man didn’t mind how the man behaved. Instead, he lightly coughed and thought to say something else when the melodic sounds of a flute arrived from a distance away. A green streak of light twinkled in the distance, and streaked towards them.

The woman’s expression changed several times after hearing the flute sounds, but her face soon returned to normal.

Old man Zhao was initially stunned, but he soon thought of something and took another look at the woman with a baffled expression on his face.

As for the man by the woman’s side, a trace of anger appeared in his otherwise calm expression.

A short moment later, a green speck of light approached them, revealing a young man who was flying through the air as he held onto a flute in front of him. With his handsome appearance and fluttering white robes, he appeared confident and relaxed.

The white clothed man flew before the group of people and loudly spoke to the woman with high spirits, “I would’ve never guessed that Miss Mei had already arrived here.”

A trace of helplessness appeared on her face and she reluctantly replied, “Fellow Daoist Fu, you’ve also come.” She didn’t seem particularly happy to see him.

The woman’s elderly brother spoke with a hoarse, cold voice, “Why are you here? My little sister has already said that she is unwilling to become your Dao companion. Why do you continue to try and associate with her? Do you think that I won’t dare to drive you away just because you have a Core Formation cultivator as a master?”

“Regardless, I am sincerely enraptured with your younger sister. So long as she remains unmarried, I will always pursue her. Fellow Daoist Mei has captured my utter devotion!” The white-clothed man went into a daze as he glanced at the woman surnamed Mei.

When the woman heard this, her cheeks blushed and she turned around, no longer paying him any heed. As for her brother, he revealed a harsh expression. Combined with his monstrous, undead appearance, he appeared particularly frightful.

Still, the white-clothed man continued to stare at the woman from behind without paying any attention to anyone else.

Old man Zhao rolled his eyes and decided to alleviate the tension by changing the subject to the island. “Cough. There is no need for emotions to cloud your reason. In a short moment, I fear there were be far more Fellow Daoists so if any treasures truly appear on the island, then we had best act quickly. Otherwise, a Core Formation Senior could arrive, and we will be left helpless.”

The three were slightly shocked upon hearing that.

The white-clothed man casually took a look above him and his expression suddenly changed. “Yi! The heavenly omen has started

to change.”

The old man and the Mei siblings couldn't help but look up in shock upon hearing him.

Sure enough, the incessantly rolling black cloud had started to revolve around a center point, and the huge cloud of Yin Qi that gathered down below the island had suddenly started to expand, as if a black monster had suddenly emerged.

“What is that? Could it be that a treasure has suddenly entered this world?” The woman asked with a face pale from astonishment.

A strange expression appeared on her brother's face as he gazed at the island and said, “Let's go take a look regardless. Perhaps an opportunity will appear before us.”

When the woman heard her brother, she hesitantly said, “But what if it isn't a treasure? What if it is an expert refining a top grade technique? Can we afford to provoke such an individual?”

Her brother impatiently said with a cold voice, “There is nothing in this world without risk, and there is always a level of danger associated with acquiring treasure. Additionally, if there truly is a Senior on the island, we will merely ask to be excused with some polite words.” Then without paying any further attention to the others, he stamped on the sword magic tool beneath his feet and flew in the direction of the small island.

The woman paused for a moment before rushing after him with a worried expression on her face. The white-robed man revealed some slight hesitation and looked in the direction of the old man. Seeing the the old man had yet to act, a trace of doubt appeared on his face. He frowned and asked, “Fellow Daoist Zhao doesn't want find out what is happening? You were the first one to propose heading to the island, but you seemed to have changed your mind.”

The old man chuckled and twirled his beard as he calmly said,

“This old man merely made a suggestion, I never said I’d be the one to go. Moreover, I’ve brought a group of juniors with me and I don’t want any harm to come their way. If there is truly any treasure, then you three Fellow Daoists may have it.”

“Humph! Brother Zhao’s words are quite pleasant to hear, but I suspect you merely wish for us to scout for you!” The white clothed man glared at the old man before staring in the direction of the Mei siblings and rushing after them with gritted teeth.

The old man watched as the white-clothed man flew into the distance, before faintly shaking his head and muttering, “Oh, beautiful women are truly a cause for calamity. Those emotions of yours will only bring you great trouble!”

When the disciples behind him heard this, they couldn’t help but look at each other in dismay.

As the three cultivators flew into the island and directly entered the area underneath the heavenly omen, the old man’s spirit shook as he stared at the island in nervous anticipation. However, he suddenly heard a cold voice from behind him, “Well aren’t you smart? You didn’t go to brave the danger. Well, even if there was a treasure, just how would you split it with your disciples?”

When old man Zhao heard this, his heart was greatly shaken. He and his disciples hurriedly turned around, but they couldn’t find even a trace of another person.

The old man grew fearful after spotting no one, but he hastily spoke with a hurried tone, “I don’t know which Senior has graced us with his presence, but I, the Grand Sun Sect’s Zhao Qiao, pay my respects to you.”

Without a body in sight, the cold voice fluctuated throughout the air without an obvious point of origin, “The Grand Sun Sect? Who is Bu Diankong to you?”

The old man trembled and hurriedly replied, “The Sect Master is

my Senior Martial Uncle. Does Senior recognize him?”

After a moment's pause, the voice spoke with a warmer tone, “Hehe! I've met him once. I had originally intended on killing you to reduce the irksome presences in the area, but since you are the disciples of my acquaintance's sect, I will spare you! However, if you juniors are foolish enough and dare to move, don't blame for being ruthless.”

“Of course, we absolutely won't inconvenience Senior.” When the old man heard this, his face grew pale. However, he felt somewhat relieved and was inwardly praising his seniors for maintaining friendly relations.

At that moment, the white-clothed man had caught up to the Mei siblings and they had approached the nearby valley, but when they were about to enter, their surroundings trembled and they suddenly found themselves surrounded in a barrier of light.

The three simultaneously heard the a man's calm voice, “Return. If you continue forward, my hand will be forced.”

The three Foundation Establishment cultivators glanced at each other with bewilderment.

The man surnamed Mei was unable to remain calm and loudly asked, “May I ask who this Fellow Daoist is and what brings him to this island?”

“I will count to ten. If you are unwilling to leave, then your bodies will remain here forever! Ten, nine, eight...” Han Li ignored his question and bluntly started to count with a cold tone.

The faces of the three revealed doubt. From his tone, they couldn't be sure if he were merely bluffing, or if he truly was a Core Formation cultivator.

During their moment of hesitation, Han Li had counted to five and more than ten huge ape puppets appeared within the light barrier with a flash. They were arranged in a semicircle and

orderly approached the three cultivators.

“Not good! Quickly, leave! Those are high grade puppets. We aren’t capable of fighting them.” The woman seemed to recognize the ferocity of the puppets and her face quickly paled.

She then grabbed her brother’s arm and flew away without any further explanation. The white-clothed man also perceived the fearsomeness of the puppets and felt his breath turn cold before quickly following after them.

After seeing the three turn tail, Han Li stopped counting, and the huge ape puppets ceased their pursuit after having only chased them for about a hundred meters. After all three had flown off without turning around, the ape puppets returned to the light barrier and disappeared without a trace.

Han Li was still sitting down cross-legged at the valley’s entrance and slowly opened his eyes, but he appeared completely solemn. In addition to a few low grade cultivators around the island, he had also noticed the presence of a Core Formation cultivator. Although the cultivator’s speed could be considered amazing, he was laid bare underneath Han Li’s spiritual sense.

He hoped that by scaring off the three of them, they would inform their fellow Foundation Establishment cultivators to flee as well. He had nothing to fear from cultivators of that grade, but he’d rather avoid a needless massacre.

However, this was only just the beginning.

He reckoned if any real troubles were to come, they would most likely arrive on the final day of the Soulrise Technique’s ritual. After all, with this much time remaining, the nearby high grade cultivators should’ve already received information.

Chapter 569: Infiltration

Han Li reckoned that there would be four Core Formation cultivators present on the last day at most. It was almost impossible for a Nascent Soul cultivator to just so happen to be nearby, this wasn't the outer seas after all. In such a vast expanse of ocean, one would typically only find a few Core Formation cultivators at most, and at his current cultivation Han Li had nothing to fear from them. Although he didn't wish to attract any attention, if those cultivators were unwilling to back down, he would have no choice but to act ruthlessly. Having come to that conclusion, Han Li's face became expressionless, and he closed his eyes once more.

The three Foundation Establishment cultivators had already returned to where they had set off from, leaving Old Man Zhao quite baffled.

The old man probingly asked, "What happened? You three Fellow Daoists have already explored the island?"

A trace of fear appeared in the woman's eyes and she shook her head, "We were too late. Another cultivator has already placed down restrictions near the area of the heavenly omen. The cultivator controls a few high level puppets, and spoke with a domineering tone. I reckon he was a Core Formation cultivator."

The old man paused for a moment before saying, "A Core Formation cultivator? It seems there is more to this heavenly omen than meets the eye. It doesn't seem to have been naturally formed. Could it be that a treasure has truly appeared?"

The white-clothed man stroked the flute in his hand and said, "Who knows? But it could be said that we were the first to arrive on the island. I suppose that the Core Formation cultivator was already on the island before the heavenly omen had occurred, and placed down spell formations beforehand. There appears to be a

mystery there.”

Old Man Zhao muttered to himself for a moment and asked, “What did that Core Formation cultivator look like? Perhaps we might discover his identity from his appearance.”

The Mei siblings and the white-clothed man looked at each other in dismay.

The old man furrowed his brow and revealed a trace of doubt, “What? Did you not catch sight of his appearance?”

When the white-clothed man saw the old man’s expression, he recalled the matter from before and his face grew sullen. He said with obvious annoyance, “Humph! If Brother Zhao doubts our words, then he can go look for himself and see whether or not that Senior will treat you leniently. I don’t believe he will!”

The old man chuckled and replied, “Fellow Daoist misunderstands, it was but an impulsive question. Since the island already has a Core Formation Senior on it, then there is no place here for people of our cultivation, regardless of whether or not any treasures truly emerge.”

The man surnamed Mei curled his lips and indignantly said, “That might not be true! Even if he is a Core Formation cultivator, if we were to join hands with a dozen fellow Foundation Establishment Daoists, perhaps we may be able to match him.”

The white-clothed man shook his head and said, “Brother Mei must be joking. Not to mention that we don’t have that many Foundation Establishment cultivators, we don’t even know if there is truly a treasure on that island or how valuable that treasure could be. Who would be willing to blindly offend a Core Formation cultivator over potentially nothing?”

When the siblings heard his words, they grimaced and opened their mouths, but they couldn’t think of anything to refute him with. As a result, they could only sigh and silently close their

mouths.

The woman surnamed Mei turned to her side and gently said, “Elder brother, since there is too much uncertainty, we should leave! There is little point in involving ourselves any further!”

Her brother was clearly hesitating due to the uncertainty. Although he knew that a Core Formation cultivator had taken action and that it would be impossible to acquire any gains, it also wasn't common to come across a rare treasure appearing in the world. As such, he was reluctant to leave. After all, to vagrant cultivators like him and his sister, this was a very rare opportunity.

“Leave? In your dreams! No one is leaving until I give them permission!” Before the brother could finish his thoughts, a cold voice suddenly arrived from varying directions.

The Mei siblings and the white-clothed man were shocked and immediately grabbed onto their storage pouches as they vigilantly looked all around. However, they were unable to find a single trace of the speaker.

With his spiritual sense continuously sweeping his surroundings, the man surnamed Mei asked the old man in a chilling tone, “Fellow Daoist Zhao, what is going on?”

The old man bitterly smiled in a helpless manner and said, “Don't ask me, I'm not allowed to leave either.”

When the other three heard this, they instantly pondered over whether or not to believe the old man. However, their musings were interrupted by a flash of yellow light light thirty meters away, that revealed a white silhouette. White Qi was wrapped around the figure, and it appeared blurry like a mirage.

When the three saw this, they were immediately frightened, and reflexively released their magic tools in front of them as they vigilantly watch the silhouette.

The white figure spoke with an icy voice and an irritated tone, “Humph! Could it be that you Juniors wish to attack me?”

Although the woman surnamed Mei was incapable of seeing the true appearance of the white silhouette, from his spiritual Qi fluctuations, she recognized him to be a Core Formation cultivator. Her face paled and she tactfully explained, “We don’t dare to. It was only that we don’t know how we offended Senior and why he won’t allow us siblings to depart.”

“Offend me? No, I merely don't wish to allow any word of this to spread outside. And until I figure out whether or not a treasure has emerged on the island, no one is allowed to move even a step. Otherwise, I'll end you immediately.” The white silhouette spoke with tremendous arrogance.

When the three heard this, they were shocked.

The white clothed man took a deep breath and slowly asked, “Since that is the case, then how about Senior go and take a look?”

The white silhouette snorted and said, “Relax, I’ll leave right now, but before that, give me a detailed explanation of what you saw on the island.”

When the three heard this, they couldn’t help but glance at one another. The woman frowned and calmly said, “Actually, we don’t have much to say. We fled after many puppets were unleashed on us. At the time...” The woman then gave an detailed narration of what had occurred on the island.

After a moment of silence, the white silhouette chuckled and said, “Controlling that many high grade puppets is beyond what a Foundation Establishment cultivator is capable of. It seems you three are somewhat intelligent. Had you delayed, you would’ve surely died!”

Soon after, the white silhouette blurred and streaked towards the small island.

The others grew elated at having seen a potential opportunity for escape. However, they heard the silhouette's voice slowly speak from a distance, "I've already told you once, if you dare to leave before I have returned, don't blame me if I head off to kill you. I am not a forgiving person!" His words gradually grew softer as he grew more distant.

With the white light now so far away, they had originally planned on slipping away. But after some consideration of the consequences, no one dared to leave and provoke the Core Formation cultivator.

At nearly the same time, Han Li opened his eyes and wore a sullen expression.

Han Li muttered in a seemingly irritated voice, "I thought that he'd come tomorrow. I didn't expect him to be the impatient sort."

Han Li's expression then stirred, and he glanced in another direction with a pensive expression.

He turned his head to the sky and sighed, "There is yet another one. It seems I'll have to deal with them one at a time. It's impossible for me to just scare Core Formation cultivators away." With that said, Han Li patted the spirit beast pouch at his waist and released a large cloud of buzzing, black-tainted Gold Devouring Beetles. After revolving once around his head, they condensed into a huge tri-colored lance.

"Since you're courting death, don't blame me for killing you!" Han Li stared at the lance for a moment and shouted, "Go!" The lance then immediately trembled and shot off without a trace. As Han Li gazed in direction of the huge lance, a trace of murderous intent appeared within his eyes.

The white silhouette approached the small island and stopped at its edge as the white Qi then disappeared to reveal a middle-aged cultivator that appeared bloodlessly pale.

He took a look up above at the heavenly omen in the sky and a strange expression flickered within his eyes. He then wrapped his body in white Qi once more and blurred his appearance before disappearing in a blur.

The white silhouette had used a concealed movement technique, wanting to sneak into the island and investigate. At that moment, over ten streaks of red light flew over from the other side of the island while escorting a gorgeous flying chariot.

The flying chariot was twenty-seven meters long and was manufactured from an unknown type of fragrant wood. It was layered with talisman characters and shined with a white light.

The carriage was being pulled by three azure demon birds. These ferocious birds were three meters long, with six eyes, and four wings. They flew at an extremely quick speed and pulled the chariot to the small island in the blink of an eye.

Chapter 570: A Powerful Enemy Appears

“Stop!” A man’s voice ordered from within the chariot as it came to an immediate stop along with the streaks of red light that accompanied it.

Soon after, each of the red radiances disappeared to reveal young beautiful women, each wearing light green palace robes. They had their black hair rolled up in a bun and two swords on their back. These female Foundation Establishment cultivators stood at the sides of the chariot and had their heads bowed in solemn expressions.

An astonished voice came from the chariot, “How strange! How can there be someone using a heretical, heaven-defying technique here? From the Yin Qi that’s gathered, it seems to be the Soulrise Technique rather than the Sunform Technique.”

A young woman’s voice soon followed, “With such an astonishing heavenly omen, why can’t it be the appearance of a wondrous treasure?” Although her tone was chilling, it carried an unconcealable sweet allure.

The first voice chuckled and spoke with confidence, “You think I can’t differentiate between a heretical technique and the appearance of a treasure?”

After a moment of silence, the woman icily snorted and bluntly said, “That’s just what you say, perhaps it truly is an omen of a treasure appearing. In any case, I can’t tell the difference between the two.”

“It you want to know whether or not it’s true, then how about we go take a look! Regardless of whether it’s the Sunform Technique or the Soulrise Technique, they both require a Core Formation cultivation to perform. Additionally, one’s cultivation would greatly suffer after performing such a technique. Even having one’s cultivation drop an entire stage is to be expected. I am quite

curious to see who is performing this technique. If their cultivation is deep enough, then let's take them in. Our Divine Dove Hall is currently lacking a few enforcers!" The man appeared exceptionally indulgent to the woman.

The woman hesitated for a moment before agreeing, "Fine, the beast chariot has flown for nearly a month, and I am feeling somewhat bored. Let's go to the island for some relief."

"Just a moment. I'll disable the protective barrier!"

Soon after he said this, the chariot flashed with white light and the radiance slowly faded, revealing the man and woman sitting within.

The man appeared to be a youth in his late twenties wearing a tall hat and hemp robes, giving him an elegant and refined appearance. As a result of an unknown cultivation art, his forehead faintly glowed with golden light.

At his side sat a young woman that appeared to be in her late teens. She was dressed in white muslin robes, with skin as smooth as jade, and long, black satin-like hair. However, the woman's complexion was deathly pale, giving her the dream-like appearance of an otherworldly Immortal.

The young woman leaned against a corner of the chariot and frowned as if she were displeased, but after seeing the light barrier dissolve, her expression stirred as she stood up and left the carriage.

The man gently watched the woman and followed her out with a faint smile.

The young woman glanced in the direction of the island and wantonly said, "Fellow Daoist Wen, do you think the odds of a ghost mist appearing nearby is high? According to what I know of the most mysterious natural disaster, ghosts mists have no clear set of patterns."

Accustomed to her odd behavior, the man held his arms behind his back and smiled, “There are no exact patterns that can be found from ghost mists. However, I have spent quite a bit of effort in gathering data for the ghost mists that have occurred in the last few hundred years and discovered something that was quite interesting. Ghost mists often immediately occur after there is a volcanic eruption nearby. Although this isn’t always the case, there is at least a one-third correlation. These seas happened to have had two volcanic eruptions nearby, so I reckon the odds of a ghost mist appearing are relatively high.”

When the young woman heard him, her eyes revealed a strange expression. After a moment of hesitation, she slowly asked, “Did Fellow Daoist Wen spend such a long time traveling with me to this place in order to see the ghost mist? When ordinary cultivators encounter a ghost mist, they perish. Why would you take the initiative to go searching for a ghost mist?”

“Why shouldn’t I? I have no present matters at hand, and wouldn’t be better to see whether or not my hypothesis is true? Don’t tell me that if a ghost mist truly appears here that I won’t be able to flee?” The youth surnamed Wen waved his sleeve with an indifferent expression.

When the young woman heard him, she remained silent for a time and pointed to the heavenly omen above the island and calmly asked, “Are we going now? It seems the cultivator is in the middle of a crucial period of the ritual. Wouldn’t we be bothering them?”

An arrogant expression appeared on the elegant man’s face and he bluntly said, “Me, a bother? I, Wen Tianren, wish to have a chat with the Core Formation cultivator. If he dares to be rude to me, then I will kill him.”

The woman glanced at the youth in silence, but it was true that this man’s abilities were vast and profound. Although he had yet to condense a Nascent Soul, he was peerless among cultivators of the

same grade. He was famed as the strongest Core Formation cultivator in the Scattered Star Seas, and it was likely to truly be the case.

“Yi!” The man’s expression suddenly stirred and he glanced at the island in astonishment.

“What, is something the matter?” Although the young woman was curious, she asked with a cold and detached tone.

A trace of seriousness appeared on his face as the man observed the island, “How interesting, there are three Core Formation cultivators on this island. Two of them are lacking and are at early Core Formation, and one of them is using a somewhat impressive concealment technique, but he is still beneath my notice. However, there is a late Core Formation cultivator present that appears abnormal, and has noticed my spiritual sense sweeping over him. In fact, his spiritual sense may be greater than my own.”

When the young woman heard this, she was shocked. She had personally witnessed his spiritual sense rivaling that of Nascent Soul eccentrics, but now he had met a Core Formation cultivator with an even stronger spiritual sense. This was truly hard for her to believe, causing an odd expression to appear on her face for the first time in a long while.

However, the young woman knew that while this man appeared gentle and refined, he was by no means magnanimous. Rather, he was a cunning, sinister, fickle and temperamental man that would kill others at a whim in a display of overwhelming power. Fortunately, the man seemed to view her personality as interesting and hadn’t treated her forcefully, much to her relief.

Although his expression appeared normal, she reckoned that he was already filled with killing intent. After all, he was incredibly proud of having his spiritual sense match that of a Nascent Soul eccentric. How could he allow a similar grade cultivator with abilities superior to his continue to exist?

The young woman sighed and could only feel a trace of pity towards the cultivator on the island.

While this was occurring, there was a piercing whistle that shrieked across a rocky area on the small island several kilometers away from the valley. Afterwards, an extremely huge tri-colored lance appeared from the south and passed through the area in an instant.

Puff... Light glimmered as the huge lance suddenly struck a mist of white Qi. The person inside the Qi barrier wavered and revealed a panic stricken face.

He gaped in terror and immediately spat out a violet jade club, but in that same instant, the barrier of Qi had been broken. Before the white silhouette could do anything with his magic treasure, a hole had already appeared through his body.

The corpse filled the air with blood as it fell to the ground, and with a bang, the corpse disappeared into the rocky area below. The lance then transformed back into a swarm of insects that now enveloped a storage pouch and a violet jade club as they returned to the valley with a low buzz.

A short moment later, Han Li grabbed the storage pouch and swept his spiritual sense through it. In his other hand, he held the violet club and was fiddling with it absentmindedly. A short moment later, Han Li put the items away and slowly turned his head to look into the distance with a gloomy expression.

Not long after he had released his Gold Devouring Beetles, he had felt a well concealed spiritual sense sweep past his body, causing him to nearly jump in fright. It had left an impression very similar to that of a Nascent Soul Eccentric. As a result, he had carefully tracked it back to a group of cultivators that had just appeared. He was shocked after discovering the owner of the fearsome spiritual sense to be an imposing late Core Formation cultivator with a young appearance. In fact, he didn't seem all that different from

Han Li himself.

Han Li was dumbstruck! In the instant he had swept his spiritual sense past the cultivator, the cultivator had discovered his prying and used some sort of restriction to forcibly repel his spiritual sense. Han Li grew sullen at suddenly being blocked from further observation.

Chapter 571: Disciple Of Archsaint Six Paths

After Han Li's spiritual sense was repelled, he naturally concluded that these arrivals weren't ordinary cultivators. With the sneaky white silhouette easily dealt with by his Gold Devouring Beetles, Han Li could now focus the entirety of his attention on the newly arrived late Core Formation cultivator.

Han Li turned his gaze back into the valley and saw that the spell formation had become covered in an impenetrable barrier of pitch-black Yin Qi. He reckoned that Yuan Yao was at a crucial moment of the Soulrise Technique. If she were to be disturbed at this point, not only would Yan Li doomed to forever be nothing more than a disembodied soul, but Yan Yao would also receive terrible a backlash and injury.

Han Li frowned and turned his head around with a pensive expression.

Although he didn't know where this youth had suddenly appeared from, he didn't dare to underestimate him. Of course, Han Li wasn't afraid of him in the slightest, either. Confident in his fantastical magic treasures, Han Li viewed no Core Formation cultivator as a threat.

He then pondered about whether or not he should take the initiative to eliminate him. After all, the new arrival appeared to be a rather problematic individual and if he were to join hands with other cultivators, it could prove extremely troublesome. With a sudden change of expression, Han Li immediately stood up with narrowed eyes.

The man had departed the carriage and was now flying towards Han Li with the beautiful young woman in tow.

Han Li's expression grew solemn and raised his hands, releasing over ten of his huge puppets to protect the valley while he was gone. He then stamped his foot without any further hesitation and

flew towards the man and woman in a streak of azure light.

If he had a confrontation with cultivators near the valley, it could disrupt Yuan Yao's ritual. From how strong the enemy appeared, he reckoned it would take some time to kill him. As such, he could only take the opportunity to approach him and force him to stay away from the valley.

The elegant youth didn't fly particularly fast and after a moment, Han Li met him at the edge of the island.

Han Li had already changed his appearance long before assuming the role of protector. As a result, he had no fear of being recognized as the one who had seized the Heavenvoid Cauldron.

With about four hundred meters separating them, Han Li expressionly gazed at the elegant man and the beautiful woman following him. A trace of astonishment flickered within his eyes after he examined them.

Although the golden light glowing from his forehead was eye-catching, it merely showed that his cultivation art was somewhat peculiar. However, Han Li couldn't help but look at the astonishingly beautiful woman at his side in awe.

For some unknown reason, Han Li felt a trace of familiarity towards her as if he had seen them somewhere before, especially with her clear eyes.

However, Han Li was positive that this was the first time he had seen the gorgeous young woman. Had he seen her before, she definitely would've left an impression.

At that moment, both of them were glancing at Han Li.

Wen Tianren held his arms behind his back and a strange expression flickered within his eyes. He then smiled and said, "Might I know your esteemed name? Is the one performing the heaven-defying technique your Dao Companion?"

When Han Li heard this, he felt his heart tremble. The elegant

man obviously knew the origins of the heavenly omen, revealing that he was far more fearsome than he had imagined.

“My name isn’t anything important. However, I must insist that you Fellow Daoists turn back! Since you already know that the heavenly omen isn’t a sign of a treasure emerging, then why have you two come to this island?” Han Li emotionlessly asked.

The young man indifferently said, “I’m not here for the heavenly omen, but for you!”

“For me?” Han Li frowned. This was beyond what he had expected.

A trace of hostility appeared on Wen Tianren’s elegant face as he icily said, “That’s right! If your esteemed self is unwilling to tell me your name, then I won’t demand it. However, I do have some knowledge of the Core Formation cultivators in each sect, and from your unfamiliar appearance, it appears that you are a vagrant cultivator. Since that is the case, I will give you and your Dao companion two choices. You either enter the coalition, and become an enforcer of my Divine Dove Hall, following all of my commands. Or you will die here by my hand.”

“Listen to your orders? Enter your coalition? You’re a member of the Starfall Coalition?” When Han Li heard him, he was stunned, but soon reexamined the man with gaze of doubt.

The young woman said with a neutral tone, “Young Master Wen is a brilliant student of the Starfall Coalition’s Archsaint Six Paths. It wouldn’t be considered a disgrace if you were to swear allegiance to him. Additionally, with Fellow Daoist’s cultivation, you will be placed in an important position within the coalition.”

“You’re a disciple of Archsaint Six Paths?” Han Li’s expression stirred. Although he knew the man’s identity had to be unordinary, he hadn’t expected it to be shocking to this degree.

When Wen Tianren saw Han Li’s shock, his expression remained

the same despite a trace of pride appearing in his eyes. He happily enjoyed the amazement he saw from Han Li when he heard of his identity. He didn't feel any shame in using his identity as Archsaint Six Paths' disciple, as he considered one's identity to be a resource.

However, Wen Tianren's spirits quickly fell when Han Li's expression turned into a sneer.

Using a derisive tone, Han Li said, "So it turned out to be a young master of the Starfall Coalition. I apologize for my lack of manners! However, I don't possess the slightest intention of entering your esteemed coalition, nor do I have any intention of dying. Rather, I have another proposal. How about I take Young Master Wen's life instead?"

From Wen Tianren's overbearing manner, he clearly understood that this man wasn't benevolent in the slightest. Not only did he feel a trace of killing intent from his spiritual sense, but he faintly felt that the young master planned on killing him regardless of whether or not he surrendered. Since Han Li was going to end up fighting him either way, he saw little reason to bother entertaining him. Others might hold the enormous Starfall Alliance in fear, but Han Li held it in little regard. After all, with the Heavenvoid Cauldron in his possession, he may as well be a fugitive from everyone in the Inner Star Seas.

"Good, very good!" Wen Tianren furiously smiled and stared at Han Li with an increasingly icy gaze. In the instant, he finished speaking, he spat out a streak of blue light.

Just as the blue light left his mouth, it burst with dazzling light and disappeared from sight.

Han Li's face grew stern, and he unconsciously waved the jade scepter in his hand, causing a barrier of red and yellow light to instantly cover him.

In the moment the barrier appeared, the blue light had struck the

light barrier with a muffled thump.

Han Li's expression faintly changed after being pushed back ten meters by the strike.

At that moment, he clearly saw that the blue streak was a peculiar awl that was several inches long. It crackled with blue light and had talisman characters winding around it.

Without any further thought, Han Li flicked his fingers, sending ten streaks of azure sword Qi in the direction of the blue awl.

Without any further reservations, Han Li slapped his storage pouch and took out his Five Element Bands. They immediately shined a rainbow light and hummed. With his other hand, he flung out over twenty flying swords in the direction of Wen Tiannren.

Wen Tianren didn't appear surprised in the slightest at having his attack blocked. Instead, he calmly pressed his hands together and summoned a small flag. The four-inch long flag flickered with purple light and possessed an astonishing spiritual Qi.

At that same moment, he glanced in front of him to see a swarm of flying swords and revealed an expression of surprise. He didn't dare to be negligent and quickly waved the purple flag in his hand, causing countless purple clouds to be spurt out. They completely enveloped him and hid him from view.

A trace of annoyance appeared in Han Li's eyes, as he had wanted to use the Five Element Bands to restrain Wen Tianren. Instead, he had the bands combine into one huge ring and protect his body. At that same moment, he formed an incantation gesture with his hands, activating the Swordshadow Phantasm Technique.

The twenty four azure swords suddenly blurred and multiplied into a swarm of ninety-six azure streaks, piercing through the azure cloud in an overbearing assault.

When the gorgeous young woman saw this from a distance, she revealed astonishment and her expression paled from shock and

disbelief. Soon, a complicated expression flickered across her face.

The azure streaks of light were like countless wasps as they continuously pierced through the clouds. However, their countless strikes passed through the cloud as if nothing were there.

When Han Li saw this, he unconsciously frowned and his expression turned grim. Although he knew that he wouldn't so easily rid himself of Wen Tianren, this person had yet again exceeded his expectations.

With that thought, he pointed to his flying swords and had them revolve once more around the azure clouds as they hummed, transforming into ten-meter-long swords that emitted a suffocating pressure.

At that same moment, Han Li slapped the spirit beast pouch at his waist.

Chapter 572: Bitter Battle

Countless Gold Devouring Beetles rushed out from Han Li's storage pouch before instantly forming into a huge tri-colored cloud. The beetle swarm was about a hundred meters wide and emitted an astonishing pressure.

“Yi!” A distant yell of fright was heard in response.

Han Li's eyes coldly glinted as his gaze fell onto the gorgeous, young woman.

The woman was covering her small, delicate mouth while her eyes revealed astonishment. Han Li was surprised when he noticed that her expression seemed to hold an inexplicable hint of joy.

Han Li was momentarily distracted by her inexplicable display when two massive rumbles erupted and tore his attention back to the battle at hand. He hastily turned his gaze back to the purple clouds in alarm. An ancient copper shield that glowed with white light had left the azure clouds and easily blocked the strikes of his two huge swords.

Han Li inwardly sighed at this, as he still hadn't taken much time to temper the flying swords. He had relied on the extraordinary quality of materials of the swords to overwhelm the magic treasures of common cultivators. But now that he had reached late Core Formation stage, the might of his magic treasures had clearly fallen behind those of his peers. Even when merging them together, his flying swords didn't pose much of a threat to cultivators of a similar grade.

As these thoughts surged through his mind, he had his two flying swords continue to strike the violet cloud regardless of their efficacy, but the ancient shield was able to block every strike with ease.

At that moment, Han Li released a series of low-pitched whistles,

causing his Gold Devouring Beetles to hum for a moment before swarming towards the purple cloud en masse. Although he didn't know what the purple cloud was made of, it would still be consumed by the Gold Devouring Beetles all the same.

Seeing that huge cloud of insects suddenly appear, Wen Tianren couldn't help but coldly snort in disdain, "Humph! Insect techniques? You're courting death!"

When Han Li heard this he immediately felt a surge of joy. If Wen Tianren treated his Gold Devouring Beetles as common insects, then when the swarm of beetles arrived at the purple cloud his death was practically assured.

Han Li inwardly sneered, but just as the insect swarm arrived at the purple clouds, Wen Tianren suddenly shouted, "Go!"

An astonishing scene then occurred!

A golden light suddenly burst forth from the purple cloud and countless gold threads shot out. The gold threads shot into the swarm of Gold Devouring Beetles. Then in the wake of several loud cracks, dead beetles began to fall from the sky like a heavy rain.

The gold threads had actually overwhelmed the Gold Devouring Beetles. The beetles were greatly resistant against the strikes of magic treasures, but against these golden threads, they were completely defenseless.

When Han Li saw this, he was overwhelmed by furious alarm. He hastily released a sharp whistle to have his insect swarm immediately return and revolve around him. However, the golden threads weren't about to let the beetles slip away. They shot after the beetles as they escaped, filling the sky with their bodies.

Han Li grimaced and without any further thought, he hastily slapped his storage pouch and took out the ancient flower basket, before tossing it out without hesitation. The flower basket turned

into a cloud of white Qi in a flash of light and directly approached the gold threads.

When the white Qi had incorporeally passed through the insect swarm and arrived among the golden threads, he wore a strange expression and quickly formed an incantation gesture with his hands. The white Qi immediately began to spin and glow with white radiance.

The golden threads were enveloped by the white light and were immediately restrained, slowing them down immensely.

The beetle swarm took advantage of that opening to fly back into Han Li's spirit beast pouches.

However, Han Li's expression was extremely unsightly at that moment. In that short exchange, he had lost nearly ten thousand of his black-tainted Gold Devouring Beetles. If he hadn't used the ancient flower basket to respond, he would have suffered devastating losses.

Just what kind of magic treasures were these threads for them to contain such fearsome power? He was in complete disbelief as to what had just happened. His Gold Devouring Beetles were repelled before they could even display their tremendous power.

Han Li had momentarily become despondent before he observed the gold threads undergo a transformation while within the white Qi. After seeing them gently flicker, they dimmed and revealed their true form. They were thin golden needles and were only about an inch long and had a golden luster.

When Han Li saw this, he was truly shocked. Wen Tianren actually used flying needles, the most difficult magic treasure to refine, and in a number of at least several hundred of them no less. This caused Han Li's blood to run cold.

However, Han Li's thoughts stirred as something soon came to mind.

At that moment, the lightless golden needles had simultaneously released a dazzling gleam and hurriedly gathered into one spot before condensing into a golden sword in an instant.

The golden sword gently trembled before suddenly breaking through the restrictions of the flower basket and shooting in Han Li's direction.

Han Li's expression sank and he took out a sparkling azure talisman from his storage pouch. This was the treasure talisman that Layman Qingyi had given to him at Heavenvoid Hall. As the treasures it had been refined from were also flying needles, they should be an equal match.

Just as the golden sword rushed towards Han Li, it split into countless golden threads with a bang as they continued forward.

Without any further hesitation, Han Li spat a cloud of azure Qi onto the talisman. With a flicker of azure light, the talisman instantly transformed into a streak of azure light.

As soon as the azure light left Han Li's light barrier, it instantly transformed into an overbearing number of azure threads of light. At first glance, they appeared no different from the golden threads apart from their color.

"What are those?" Wen Tianren was stunned and spoke with a surprised tone.

The golden threads had already arrived at Han Li's side and began to interweave themselves amongst the azure threads, resulting in pulsing balls of light.

Wen Tianren shouted in alarm and coldly asked, "The Nightazure Needles! What relationship do you have with Layman Qingyi? That's a treasure talisman of his Nightazure Needles. That old ghost has always been annoyingly stingy and treats those needles as if they were as valuable as his own life. Could it be that you are his disciple?"

When Han Li heard Wen Tianren shout out the name of the Nightazure Needles, his heart trembled but he soon regained his calm.

It appeared that although the matter of the Heavenvoid Cauldron had been leaked, the specific details of what had occurred weren't widely known. Otherwise, he surely would've known his identity upon seeing the needles.

With that thought, Han Li had no intention of further speaking and only scoffed. He then circulated all the magic power in his body and took advantage of Wen Tianren's moment of hesitation, pushing back the golden light threads and turning the tide of battle into Han Li's favor.

Wen Tianren's furious voice yelled from within the violet cloud, "You're courting death! Since you're unwilling to explain, I won't bother to show that old ghost Qing Yi any face. I will have you personally witness the most formidable Devilish cultivation art in the Scattered Star Seas - The Devils of Six Apexes. Don't blame me for being ruthless!" After that was said, he recalled the golden threads from their confrontation with the Nightazure Needles, having the needles fly back into the purple cloud in an instant.

Han Li scowled as the atmosphere suddenly became silent. Without any reservations, he had the azure streaks of light surround the purple cloud and madly pierce into it. However, it ended up with the same result as before. All of the streaks of light pierced through the purple cloud with little effect.

A cold air of resolve then emitted from Han Li's face. He immediately recalled the needles and had them return into a talisman before placing them back into his storage pouch.

As the Nightazure Needles were extremely powerful, he wasn't going to allow the talisman's power go to waste.

Han Li's expression wavered as he continued to look at the tranquil purple cloud. A trace of hesitation could faintly be seen

from his face as if he wished to act, but he managed to refrain from acting all the same.

In the following instant, the purple cloud suddenly began to roil and summon a gale, agitating the spiritual Qi in the nearby several tens of kilometers which began to pour into the violet cloud like rivers pouring into an ocean. The cloud then began to wildly expand and its color began to turn light grey. Additionally, odd sounds began to blast out from the cloud. They were initially soft before growing deafening in an instant, disturbing the hearts of those who heard it.

After witnessing the strange scene, Han Li's hesitation had completely disappeared.

He suddenly grabbed his right arm with his left hand and raised it towards the light grey cloud, as his arm began gathering a freezing, malicious Qi.

As the nearby environmental spiritual Qi continued to wildly pour into the light grey cloud, its sounds came to resemble immense thunder, shaking the hearts of all lower-grade cultivators nearby.

Chapter 573: Yin Devil Execution VS The Six Apex Devils

In stark contrast to the conspicuous movements of the grey cloud, Han Li held out his right arm in complete silence as a faint layer of black Qi condensed on it. The black Qi pulsed and gradually grew denser, and when it had become as dense as ink, Han Li wore a grim expression on his face.

His entire right arm began to quickly swell, becoming over three times denser in an instant. There was even a layer of glaring blood light that shined from underneath the enveloping black Qi.

At that moment, Han Li raised his head to look at Wen Tianren.

The grey cloud had begun to release huge rumbles at a greater frequency, and had already expanded to an area of a hundred meters.

With hostility shining within Han Li's eyes, he suddenly shouted, "Destroy!" His thick arm suddenly shrank and a beam of black and red light shot from his palm. The beam was ten meters long when it was released and arrived in front of the cloud in the blink of an eye while leaving behind a long strand of light in its wake.

Aware that this wasn't something to underestimate, Wen Tianren had his ancient copper shield untangle itself from its confrontation from the huge swords and arrived in front of the cloud with a flash of brilliance.

The beam wasn't blocked in the slightest and passed through the copper shield as if there was nothing there. Its futile attempt to block the beam had turned the shield to dust without the slightest sound.

A muffled groan sounded out as the beam passed through the cloud. In an instant, a black crack had appeared within it and the cloud began to dissolve after it was cleanly split into two. After

splitting apart the clouds, the expanse of light traveled ten meters further before scattering into specks of starlight.

At that moment, from one of the clouds, Wen Tianrun howled with rage, “How dare you sever my arm!? I’ll have your life as payment!” Soon after that furious roar, the other cloud disappeared to reveal a severed arm floating in midair. From the cloth that remained on the arm, it appeared to be Wen Tianming’s left arm.

When Han Li saw this, his eyes narrowed and he instantly recalled the name of a legendary Devil Dao technique - Cataclysmic Graft!

This technique used a limb that had been refined in advance as a substitute to block an attack from reaching their body. With only a single thought, one could have their own limb take the place of any severe harm that came their way. It was particularly effective at handling curse type heretical techniques.

However, it was said that this legendary Devilish Dao secret technique could only be refined by Nascent Soul cultivators. It was beyond Han Li’s imagination for Wen Tianren to be able to fully use this technique.

As for the fearsome attack that Han Li had just used, it was a secret technique from the Profound Yin Scriptures called the Yin Devil Execution. It operated in a same manner as the Blood Spirit Drill. They both refined a portion of one’s base essence that was folded to contain an immense, unstoppable force that was consumed after a single use.

The cultivation of an individual affected how many times the base essence could be folded, signifying its strength, as well as the amount of time it would require to condense. According to legend, when it was condensed to the deepest folds, it could tear through space itself and leave only the void in its path.

Of course, who could actually invest that much time and effort

into preparing a strike of that degree? Han Li himself was only able to condense the attack to a small degree and that was after much effort. Having seen his last two attacks remain ineffective, Han Li had guessed that the cloud possessed a miraculous effect of shifting one's position. As a result, he determined that he needed to use the Yin Devil Execution. Although the attack wasn't able to tear through space itself, it had broken through Wen Tianren's evasion technique with great efficacy.

Although Wen Tianren may have avoided calamity through the Cataclysmic Graft, his Origin Qi must've suffered quite heavily. And from the bloody scent of his severed arm, he couldn't be doing too well.

As Han Li inwardly sneered, he heard a rustle and the cloud began to release an expanse of golden light towards his arm before enveloping it.

Han Li was startled and revealed a strange expression. Just as he pondered what Wen Tianren was doing, a cold and unnatural whistle roared from the grey cloud. The cloud was then swept away to reveal Wen Tianren's body.

A cold expression appeared on Han Li's face as he stared at him.

Wen Tianren stared back with obvious resentment. At his side, there were six huge malevolent phantoms with horns on each of their heads, tusks emerging from their mouths and scales covering their bodies. With the addition of the devilish Qi that coiled around their bodies, it appeared as if devils had truly been brought into this world.

Han Li gloomily muttered, "Devils of Six Apexes?"

Wen Tianren coldly snorted and glanced at his severed arm before staring at Han Li with killing intent, "Now you will know the fearsomeness of Archsaint Six Paths. Although these are only the phantoms of the Archsaint, they will be more than enough to deal with a Core Formation cultivator like you."

Ever since Wen Tianren had attained his current profound cultivation, he had yet to suffer such heavy injury. With the addition of Han Li's remarkably powerful magic treasures, he felt an even greater urge to kill him.

Wen Tianren suddenly held out his arm stump and had a slim, dual horned phantom behind him spit out a sliver of faint red mist. The mist quickly wrapped around the arm stump a moment later, the mist scattered to reveal a completely restored arm. He then moved his fingers and waved his hand two times as if it had completely recovered.

When Han Li saw this, he wore an expression of astonishment.

When Wen Tianren saw Han Li, a mocking expression appeared on his face. He then clapped his hands together and the phantoms behind them grew slightly taller. Their bodies then began to blur as if they were about to take action.

Han Li instantly reacted by raising his hand and pointing at Wen Tianren's head.

The two huge azure swords suddenly burst with radiance and chopped at Wen Tianren.

However, Wen Tianren merely continued to coldly stare at Han Li and ignored his swords. The tallest and most fiendish of the phantoms behind him flew up and grabbed onto the huge swords in a flash, holding one in each of its hands.

Han Li's expression grew solemn and he clutched his hands in an incantation gesture. The huge swords began to glow with azure light as they were grasped in the phantom's hands and struggled as fiercely as they could. The eyes of the phantom then flickered with red light and its grip tightened. It violently spat out grey devilfire from its mouth onto the flying swords and began to roast them.

"Haha! The strength apex devil has grabbed onto your magic treasures. Do you actually believe that they will be able to escape?"

Wen Tianren howled with laughter at the sight of the flying swords being roasted. He then pointed at Han Li without hesitation, having his other five phantoms blur and disappear. A short moment later, they appeared right outside of Han Li's barrier.

Wen Tianren appeared to believe that his victory was all but certain and prepared to have the phantoms exterminate Han Li.

From the strength displayed by the incarnation of the strength apex devil, he was confident that if the six phantoms joined hands, even early Nascent Soul cultivators would find it difficult to deal with them. The Six Apex Devils Art was truly worthy of being known as the top ranked Devilish Art in the Scattered Star Seas.

At that moment, Han Li's expression grew cold after seeing the new developments. He then raised his hands and dense bolts of golden lightning flashed out, striking the phantoms nearest to him.

Wen Tianren couldn't believe his eyes. Following two cracks of thunder, the phantoms dimmed and wore an expression of bitter suffering before fading away in a pulse of grey light.

"Ah!" Wen Tainren was shocked and remained in disbelief as if what he just saw were a trick of the eyes.

Han Li's hands struck again with lightning, instantly exterminating another two of the phantoms in an instant.

At that same moment, Wen Tianren had finally regained his mind! Full of regret, he loudly yelled and spat out a ball of silver light while simultaneously ordering his last phantom to flee. Although these apex devil phantoms had been formed from the nearby spiritual Qi, a portion of his own body's spiritual power was also incorporated into them. When each of them died, a portion of his cultivation also declined. Although he would be able to regain it later, it would prove disadvantageous while still in combat.

But before the ball of silver light reached Han Li, he heard another clap of thunder above him.

Wen Tianren's complexion paled as he hastily raised his head and saw that the strength apex devil had turned to ash. The two huge swords had arcs of golden lightning covering them and were chopping straight towards him.

Wen Tianren unconsciously leapt away in a flash of red light and disappeared before the swords could strike him. In the following moment, Wen Tianren appeared a hundred meters away with an ashen complexion as he stared at Han Li. His two legs were now ablaze with a crimson flame. Glimmers of azure light could be spotted from within the the flames.

Han Li was currently unable to control his flying swords to continue their pursuit of Wen Tianren. At that moment, Wen Tianren's ball of silver light had arrived before him and turned into a huge silver bell and unexpectedly knocked into him.

Chapter 574: The Golden Mirrors Of Eight Gates

Gazing at the huge bell, Han Li pointed at the ancient flower basket in front of him and had it transform into white Qi before shooting to the top of the bell.

At that same moment, a muffled clang reverberated throughout the bell. The sound wasn't loud, but with the bell mouth pointed at Han Li, he felt his mind shake from the sound and he nearly collapsed.

It was the type of attack most annoying to him, a sound based attack!

Han Li inwardly cursed but he didn't dare be negligently react. With a flash of white light, the flower basket returned to its original form as a flower basket. Soon, it started revolved and spouted out a white radiance that enveloped the silver bell, attempting to draw it in.

Of course, the silver bell naturally wasn't going to just obediently submit. It shined with a blinding silver light and incessantly rang, but because it was surrounded in layers of white Qi, the attacks were dulled. While Han Li still felt uncomfortable from the attacks, he was able to stay standing.

At that moment, Han Li paid no more attention to the two ancient treasures above him and turned his gaze to the man across from him.

“Divine Devilbane Lightning! You possess a magic treasure made of Golden Lightning Bamboo!” Apart from the legendary Divine Devilbane Lightning that specialized in subduing evil and devilish arts, Wen Tianren knew of no other lightning with such heaven-defying power that was capable of eliminating his apex devil incarnations in an instant. The appearance of Golden Lightning

Bamboo had caused a blood bath when it had last appeared in the past, but now it had appeared before him, refined into a magic treasure no less. This realization shocked Wen Tianren to the core.

Han Li's expression faintly changed after hearing Wen Tianren call out the name of the lightning, but Han Li sneered before wiping his face of emotion. He merely controlled the flower basket above him and intended to restrain the silver bell before doing anything else.

Wen Tianren naturally knew that he had guessed correctly after seeing Han Li's reaction and his face grew pale. Regardless of whether or not he was the disciple of the number one figure of the Devil Dao, after realizing that he now faced an unordinary cultivator along with the fearsomeness of the Divine Devilbane Lightning, he became filled with trepidation.

After seeing his apex devils struck down by the Divine Devilbane Lightning without the slightest resistance, he realized that the legends of the lightning's effectiveness against devilish techniques were completely true. So long as Han Li possessed this lightning, he would be incapable of using a vast majority of his Devil Dao techniques. Wen Tianren took a deep breath and glanced at Han Li's expressionless figure.

Wen Tianren's face became incredibly gloomy and his heart became uneasy, at the faint realization that Han Li would inevitably become a nemesis. Not only were his magic treasures and cultivation equal to his own, but the Divine Devilbane Lightning could restrain a vast majority of his techniques. This was intolerable.

Wen Tianren glanced at Han Li and hardened his resolve. "No matter how dire the cost, you will not be leaving this island alive. Only with the Golden Lightning Bamboo treasure in my hands will I finally feel at ease."

At that moment, the gorgeous young woman that stood in the

distance had been left dumbstruck by the series of exchanges in the battle.

When the young woman had seen Han Li control the Gold Devouring Beetles she had already guessed his true identity, much to her shock!

It was truly difficult for her to believe that in only a few tens of years, Han Li's cultivation had climbed to late Core Formation from early Core Formation. But after she recalled that the legendary Heavenvoid Cauldron was in Han Li's possession, she grew somewhat calmer.

Before this point, the young woman wasn't very confident that Han Li would win the battle. She believed that he would only last a while at most before being defeated, and didn't expect that Han Li would hold the advantage. Han Li's faint golden lightning in particular had left the woman at a loss for words. When she saw it destroy Wen Tianren's phantoms, her core was shaken.

Divine Devilbane Lightning! She had recognized the gold lightning before Wen Tianren had!

She was the one who had originally given Han Li the stalk of thousand year old Heaven Lightning Bamboo. But now, it had already become ten-thousand-year old Golden Lightning Bamboo! The woman could only guess that Han Li had somehow acquired other Heavenly Lightning Bamboo during his travels.

This gorgeous young woman was obviously Fairy Violet Spirit who had last seen Han Li at the Heavenvoid Hall. This woman's appearance had greatly changed and she seemed to be unwillingly travelling together with Wen Tianren. There seemed to be quite the story behind her current circumstances!

As of current, Fairy Violet Spirit was gritting her teeth as she watched the scene in the distance, faintly feeling that the battle was about to resume.

Seeing that the silver bell was about to be captured by Han Li's flower basket, Wen Tianren's expression stirred and the golden radiance on his forehead suddenly grew brighter. Soon, it extended and condensed into a small, exquisite horn. It shined with golden luster and was covered in profound talisman characters. Not only did it lack any devilish Qi, but it was actually filled with an extremely pure spiritual Qi.

After seeing this horn, Han Li's eyes narrowed and his heart trembled. He instantly pointed to his two azure swords in the distance and had their sword arts dissolve.

The huge azure swords hummed and one of the swords split into twenty-four swords with the other sword dissolving into light. Han Li then employed the Swordshadow Phantasm Technique and had them form three identical copies of light as they returned back to Han Li's side. They then continuously revolved around Han Li to form a protective barrier around him.

Wen Tianren turned a blind eye to Han Li's actions and calmly said, "Good, very good! I didn't expect that you'd pressure me to this degree. I originally believed that apart from those old Nascent Soul monsters that there would be no enemies who were a match for me, but it seems I was arrogant and narrow minded. It's good that I encountered you here; in fact, it can even be considered fortunate. Else, it would've become far more troublesome for me to kill you once you entered Nascent Soul stage."

With the golden horn appearing on his forehead, he appeared completely confident, and all signs of his previous panic had disappeared without a trace.

Without showing any emotion on his face, Han Li swept his spiritual sense past Wen Tianren, discovering that apart from the strange horn, there were no other obvious changes to his body.

Han Li frowned and a trace of suspicion bloomed in his heart, causing him to become even more vigilant. However, he

unconsciously felt that Wen Tianren's previous words were only a bluff and that the golden horn was only some sort of trick.

But before Han Li could dispel his doubts, Wen Tianren spread out his arms and successively shot out eight balls of golden flames from his sleeves. These resplendent golden flames were fist-sized and began to quickly revolve around him.

Upon seeing that Wen Tianren had released some kind of item, Han Li took a deep breath before becoming gloomy and feeling vexed.

He clearly understood that while he possessed a number of magic treasures that few could match, Wen Tianren was likely to be one of those few exceptions. After all, he was a young master of the Starfall Coalition and a disciple of the top figure of the Devil Dao. It should've proven quite easy for him to acquire extraordinary magic treasures.

Since he couldn't continue to battle by relying on his magic treasures, he needed another method that could either trap or kill his opponent.

Unknown to Han Li, Wen Tianren was thinking along similar lines at that moment. As he faced Han Li's many powerful techniques, he felt a sense of trepidation. As a result, he ceased using any magic treasures and had decided to use his last resort, the eight balls of golden flame.

At that moments, the flames disappeared to reveal ancient palm-sized, octagonal mirrors that appeared to be made of pure gold. Their surfaces appeared as smooth as water and were glistening with golden light. Their backs were completely wrinkled and uneven, appearing quite unsightly.

When Han Li saw this, a strange expression appeared within his eyes and he faintly felt as if he had heard of these ancient mirrors before, but he couldn't quite come up with a name.

The woman behind Wen Tianren abruptly yelled in shock, “The Golden Mirrors of Eight Gates!”

Han Li was startled and glanced at the beautiful woman. She was gazing at the golden mirrors in alarm and covered her mouth with her hand.

“The Gold Mirrors of Eight Gates?” After some thought, Han Li felt as if that name was quite familiar. But when he suddenly recalled the origins of the mirrors, he felt his heart drop and he suddenly felt out of breath.

Wen Tianren deeply glanced at Fairy Violet Spirit before turning his gaze back to Han Li and icily saying, “Since my companion has already shouted out the name of these mirrors, then surely you must know how vicious they are. Now you can die without regret!”

The golden horn on his forehead began to flicker with a golden radiance and a slim golden light suddenly shot out it, shooting towards one of the nearby mirrors. The ray of light then continued to be reflected off of the other mirrors, each time growing slightly thicker. By the time it had struck all eight mirrors, it was as thick as a small bottle.

Chapter 575: Divine Golden flames

When Han Li saw the light beam increasing in size with every reflection, he furrowed his brow as he stared at every Wen Tianren's every movement. His hand tightly grasped onto the red-yellow jade scepter, and a silver light flickered from his back, followed by the appearance of two silver wings.

'The Golden Mirrors of Eight Gates! How does he possibly have such a heaven-defying treasure!' Han Li couldn't help but bitterly smiled. When he recalled the origins of the treasure, his first thoughts were that he couldn't withstand a strike of this magic treasure no matter what. From the description of its power in legend, he'd have to be deranged to even think of attempting something so foolish.

The Golden Mirrors of Eight Gates was a peak grade magic treasure that had eliminated an entire generation of Star Palace Masters. It was once the possession of a cultivator with immense and profound abilities who had once shaken the Scattered Star Seas for several hundred years. This lone cultivator had been able to withstand the entirety of the Star Palaces' forces without being at a disadvantage. At the time, this cultivator had truly been the top figure in the Scattered Star Seas.

Of course, the main reason for the fame of the "Vagrant of the Heavenly Mirrors" was his profound cultivation that eclipsed everyone else in the Scattered Star Seas. His magic treasure, the Golden Mirrors of Eight Gates, was widely known as the top ranked offensive magic treasure, even at the time of his existence. There had been countless cultivators that had fallen to the mirrors including at least six Nascent Soul cultivators, emphasizing the fearsomeness of this magic treasure!

Of course, Wen Tianren's mirrors were merely replicas of the golden mirrors. At Wen Tianren's current cultivation, it would be impossible for him to control such a mighty magic treasure. Had

he attempted to take that legendary magic treasure into his body, Wen Tianren himself feared his body would rupture from its overwhelming power.

Likewise, if Han Li truly believed that this were the original item, he would've immediately slipped away without the slightest intention of fighting back. Even with this not being the case, Han Li didn't have the slightest intention of receiving any of its attacks. After all, the original's reputation was far too frightful. He had even prepared the Thunderstorm Wings to evade its attacks should the need arise.

With the complete confidence Han Li held in the abilities of the Thunderstorm Wings, he was able to avoid panic despite the nervousness within his heart.

At that moment, the golden light had already reflected off the final mirror and grown into a head-sized golden orb of light. It floated in front of Wen Tianren and continuously pulsed as if it were about to burst.

Without any hesitation, Wen Tianren waved to the light orb which immediately flew into his palm.

Wen Tianren grabbed onto the light orb and turned to look at Han Li. An odd expression fluttered within his eyes when he saw the wings on Han Li's back, but it soon disappeared.

At that moment, Fairy Violet Spirit glanced at Wen Tianren's golden horn and then turned her gaze to the wings on Han Li's back. She felt her mouth turn dry as a complicated expression appeared on her face.

The coming battle was about to greatly widen her horizons, and was something that had reached far beyond what common cultivators were capable of. Both parties had now taken out their last resorts in what was clearly a battle of life or death. Even the intensity of the atmosphere made it hard for her to breathe. She could only silently watch on, in the hopes that her preferred

cultivator won the upcoming battle.

Wen Tianren made the first move!

He brought the golden light orb to his chest and slapped his other hand onto it, causing the orb of light to collapse and shoot out countless thumb-sized balls of light. Contrary to Han Li's expectation, the balls of light entered the octagonal mirrors.

The mirrors immediately began to glow and trembled before releasing eight dense beams of golden light.

In the same moment that the beams of light shot out from the mirrors, they had already arrived in front of Han Li with an imperceptible speed. Han Li's expression distorted at the sight.

The outermost layer of his sword mirages had instantly disappeared upon contact with the beams of light. Even the true Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were knocked away with sparks of azure light. They weren't able to put up even the slightest resistance upon making contact with the light beams.

The combined Five Element Bands flashed with rainbow light and blocked the beams for only a moment before releasing a wail and a violet flash of light before collapsing into fragments.

Han Li was overwhelmed with shock and felt pain at their loss. The Five Element Bands weren't of much use against higher grade cultivators, but they had always been successful when handling cultivators of a similar grade. Their loss was truly a pity.

After the incredibly incisive golden lights had shattered the bands, they were about to strike the final barrier of red-yellow light produced by the jade scepter.

Han Li let out a sigh as thunder roared from his back. With a slight flap, he disappeared from sight, and the eight streaks of light missed their target.

A short moment later, Han Li reappeared a hundred meters away. With yet another roar of thunder, he disappeared yet again.

Wen Tianren was startled upon seeing this, but his expression soon changed after something came to mind. His legs were aflame with scarlet flame as he flew off, instantly arriving at a nearby location. In the instant he moved, Han Li appeared at Wen Tianren's original location with an azure swordstreak flickering from his hand. Han Li revealed shock, but he soon disappeared once more in a flash of silver light, leaving thunder in his wake.

This time, Wen Tianren didn't move. Instead, he shot out another streak of golden light from his horn and had his mirrors fly upward and point down. Once the golden light entered the mirrors, they began to hum and transform into countless beams of light, filling the air around him.

At that moment, Han Li reappeared about thirty meters behind Wen Tianren and the beams of light instantly converged onto Han Li, rigidly trapping him. Han Li's expression vastly changed and he hurriedly flapped his wings. But underneath the golden light, he was completely incapable of movement.

Han Li then waved his hands without any further thoughts and spat out two flying swords towards the golden light surrounding him, and ordered them to violently chop it. The golden light was completely unaffected and began to close in on him.

Han Li's heart sank and he hurriedly opened his mouth, shooting out a dense bolt of golden lightning. The golden light slightly flickered for a moment, but they didn't sustain any damage. At that moment, the golden light had become interwoven with his red-yellow light barrier. The barrier started to sway as if it were about to be penetrated by the golden light.

Han Li's face paled as he suddenly waved his jade scepter and madly poured spiritual power into it. The yellow-red light barrier shimmered with light and its color soon became an illustrious silver, repelling the golden light with its complete strength.

When Wen Tianren saw this, he revealed surprise, but soon a

trace of hostility appeared within his eyes. He formed an incantation gesture with his hands and his small mirrors suddenly pointed at the top of Han Li's head, the golden light converged above Han Li and started to turn into balls of golden flames.

Wen Tianren became completely solemn. His hands unceasingly formed various complex incantation gestures and he began to mutter an incantation.

He soon opened his mouth and spat out several balls of pure blood essence. Each mouthful of blood left him slightly more pale. When each of the balls of blood essence entered the golden flames, his complexion had turned deathly pale and blood could no longer be seen from his face. However, the eight golden flames had instantly flared with immense light, increasing their pressure several fold.

Wen Tianren coldly glanced at Han Li and eerily said, "You are worthy enough to die from the Divine Golden Flames. With your cultivation, it'd be quite remarkable for you to last most of an hour."

Without any further hesitation, he pointed to the eight golden flames that were above Han Li, and had them drop down from above him.

Han Li was immediately submerged in the golden flames.

Wen Tianren's figure blurred and appeared above the golden flames in a cross-legged meditation position. Afterwards, he began to form extremely strange incantation gestures, and released a faint gold thread from his horn into the flames. At the same moment as Han Li was enveloped in flames, Wen Tianren slowly closed his eyes.

Beyond expectation, Han Li remained calm and stared at the golden flames surrounding him with a solemn expression.

After the golden flames had appeared, he began to circulate the

spiritual power within his body at six times the normal speed in order to sustain the silver light barrier. Otherwise, it would've dispersed underneath the flames.

It appeared that Wen Tianren wished to use the golden flames to exhaust Han Li's spiritual power and turn him to ash. He would've taken a moment to inspect just how powerful the jade scepter shield were if he didn't fear that the golden flames would take his life.

The Divine Golden Flames were truly unordinary. Although they weren't as powerful as the Celestial Ice Flames, let alone the Sacred Asura Flames, they were still on the same level as Zenith Yin's corpsefire.

Han Li was inwardly analyzing exactly how powerful the golden flames were.

Chapter 576: The Ghost Mist Appears

Were it a common late Core Formation cultivator, they wouldn't be able to withstand the golden flames for even a quarter of an hour!

However, Han Li was anything but common!

At that moment, he stared at the golden flames surrounding him with a frown and slapped his storage pouch, taking out a small bottle.

Han Li glanced at the small bottle and let out a sigh. It was the Myriad Year Spirit Milk he had just acquired, and it already appeared that he wouldn't be able to last much longer without it.

It was quite the cruel joke. Had he not acquired the spirit milk from Yuan Yao, he would've found himself in a dead end. But at the same time, were it not for this spirit milk, he wouldn't have encountered Wen Tianren, a disciple of Archsaint Six Paths, and be in this situation!

Han Li felt extremely conflicted about how this situation had developed.

According to current situation, he was currently losing, but with the half bottle of Myriad Year Spirit Milk, he felt completely secure. Regardless of the golden light that trapped him or the golden flames that scorched around him, Wen Tianren was incapable of persevering without paying a heavy cost. If Wen Tianren wanted to compete in a battle of endurance, then victory assured for Han Li. Wen Tianren's own actions were about to doom him!

With that thought in mind, a sneer momentarily appeared on Han Li's face before he sat down inside the light barrier, preparing his counter attack once Wen Tianren had exhausted himself.

Consequentially, a baffling scene transpired. The air that had

recently been filled with rolls of thunder and flashes of dazzling light had suddenly turned serene and peaceful. Wen Tianren and Han Li were both sitting down, forming their own incantation gestures in silence. However, the ten meter tall golden flames continued to burn.

When Fairy Violet spirit saw this, her luminous eyes shifted and she inwardly sighed.

From what she saw, Han Li was bound to be defeated as he was trapped within the golden flames. Although Han Li currently had a silver light barrier around him, she believed it would only provide temporary protection at most.

She stood there while wearing a complicated expression, but she had no intention of stepping forward. It appeared she didn't intend to take any action until the battle between the two of them was concluded.

At that moment, the Mei siblings, Old Man Zhao and the other low grade cultivators were grouped together about fifty kilometers away from the island. Although they were too far away to see Han Li's battle with Wen Tianren, they were able to see the brilliant flashes of light in the distance and hear the deafening explosions. This alone had left them greatly alarmed.

They had mistakenly believed that this was caused by a battle between the Core Formation cultivator on the island and the white silhouette. As such, they hadn't dared to leave, but now that all signs of fighting had disappeared, they were all left in dismay. They didn't know who was victorious or if something unexpected had occurred. Since they still didn't dare to rashly depart, they could only force themselves to stay put.

On the other side of the island, the beautiful female cultivators that had been escorting the carriage were also whispering to each other with apprehension.

Although they were all the personal maids of Wen Tianren, they

were no different than true concubines and were treated favorably by him. On that note, if something were to happen to Wen Tianren, their fates were already sealed once they returned.

However, because Wen Tianren had given them orders to remain at the carriage when he approached the island, these concubines didn't dare to rashly take action.

...

Time slowly passed while the confrontation continued.

Day eventually turned to night and night turned to early morning. Nearly an entire day passed in complete silence as if yesterday's battle had never even occurred.

At that moment, both groups of cultivators on either side of the island were impatient and filled with doubt as other cultivators were beginning to appear nearby.

After an entire day of having the heavenly omen above the island, word spread that a peculiar treasure had appeared on this small island. Naturally, cultivators began to appear nearby. A vast majority of these cultivators were at Foundation Establishment stage but there were also a few overly confident Qi Condensation cultivators mixed in.

These people began to arrive at the island from every direction. When they grew near, they discovered Old Man Zhao's group along with the female cultivators around the carriage.

Those who met Old Man Zhao and the Mei siblings were better off. As Old Man Zhao and the Mei siblings were quite well connected, many cultivators came to them to find out what had happened.

After these cultivators heard that Core Formation cultivators had already entered the island, they apprehensively muttered to themselves and gathered near the old man's party, holding no foolish thoughts of rushing the island.

As for the cultivators on the other side of the island that chose to speak to the beautiful female cultivators next to the carriage, the female cultivator in charge had taken out a banner of the Starfall Coalition without any reservations and immediately threatened them. Each of these cultivators immediately turned tail with pale faces. Since the Starfall Coalition cultivators were participating in whatever was happening on the island, nothing good would come about from staying around.

After more time had past, two Core Formation cultivators eventually arrived. They were travelling together, and one of them was the deputy island lord of Bright Emperor Island. These two arrived on the side with Wen Tianren's maids, and naturally questioned them with baffled expressions.

Because the two were Core Formation cultivators, the female cultivators didn't dare to slight them. The female cultivator in charge casually mentioned Wen Tianren's name to them as she answered.

The two Core Formation cultivators were shocked upon hearing his name. While Bright Emperor Island was considered neutral, they didn't dare to provoke the overbearing power of either the top figure of the Devil Dao or the Starfall Coalition. After casually mumbling some sort of excuse, the two immediately flew back from where they came.

What a joke! Although they didn't even know whether or not a treasure existed on this island, since a disciple of Archsaint Six Paths had arrived, they naturally had no thoughts of involving themselves. Since the young master had yet to return after approaching the island, if something had truly happened to him and they became involved, then they'd be just be heading to their deaths.

Although a small portion of cultivators were scared away by the Starfall Coalition's reputation, about forty cultivators had gathered around the island from other directions. When they

weren't able to detect any Core Formation cultivators nearby, they rushed in.

These cultivators harbored sinister designs of their own and weren't about to leave the island of their own accord. They planned to take advantage of the current chaos for their own benefit.

As the black cloud above the island continued to swirl, it had already spread out to cover the entirety of the small island, blocking all the light from shining onto the island.

A dark green beam of light suddenly shot up from the island towards the Yin clouds. At that moment, the clouds furiously roiled for a moment then began to slowly descend and remained about four hundred meters above the island before becoming serene.

The emergence of these pitch-black clouds had given the impression that a tempest was about to approach.

The heavenly omen's transformations shook the hearts of the cultivators nearby. However, a few of the more quick witted ones felt delight as they believed the green beam of light to be the sign for the emergence of a treasure.

These cultivators were suddenly overwhelmed with greed and glanced at each other for a moment before flying towards the island in groups of ten. They believed that with so many Foundation Establishment cultivators joining hands, even a Core Formation cultivator wouldn't be able to make light of them.

As for the portion of cultivators that hadn't joined, they were extremely calm and examined the other's actions with detached gazes. Since there were others willing to scout the path ahead, they were happy to sit back and watch before taking action.

At that same time, Wen Tianren's maids were no longer capable of just waiting and approached the island with the carriage in tow.

Unbeknownst to all these people was that deep within the oceans near the small island, a strange black light started to shine after an appearance of a slim black crevice. Soon after, countless threads of pitch-black Qi emerged from the crevice forming into a mist.

This pitch-black mist was only about ten meters wide at the start but it quickly began to expand. In only a short moment, it had already spread to an area of five hundred meters and continued to grow. Not only could ghostly wails be faintly heard from within the fog, but there were unceasing flashes of bizarre black lightning. Even more strange was how the nearby sea creatures were drawn into the black mist like moths to the flame.

An instant later, all life in the nearby seas had already been swept clean, but nevertheless, the black mist continued to expand as if it were unsated.

One kilometer, two kilometers...

It eventually began to emerge from the ocean's surface, allowing it to be clearly seen by those present. When everyone saw this, they became numb with fear.

From the looks of it, the mist would soon spread across the small island.

Everyone on the island, including Han Li, were at a loss as they watched its progress.

Chapter 577: Indescribable Danger

Inside the silver light barrier, Han Li raised his head and took a drop of spirit milk before glancing down at the small bottle with a pensive expression.

It was the morning of the next day and he had now taken his fifth drop of spirit milk, but the golden light outside the light barrier still didn't show the slightest sign of weakening. The flames, however, had begun to shrink. It seemed Wen Tianren wouldn't be able to sustain them for much longer, and Han Li would be able to escape fairly soon.

With that in mind, Han Li's hand flashed with white light and he calmly placed the bottle back into his storage pouch. He then glanced at the Yin clouds in the sky and unconsciously frowned.

He had clearly seen the beam of green light shooting into the skies from the direction of the valley that seemed to have been caused by Yuan Yao's spell ritual. Although he didn't know what had specifically happened, based on the black clouds lowering down, it appeared that the Soulrise Technique had yet to finish.

As quickly as these thoughts appeared in Han Li's mind, he buried them. He couldn't afford to be concerned with anything else until after he escaped the prison of golden light.

After taking a deep breath, he felt his magic treasures begin to surge with excitement. At that same moment, the silver wings could faintly be seen once more from his back.

Floating above the golden flames, Wen Tianren no longer appeared as proud as when he had initially trapped Han Li. Instead, his face had begun to pale and a layer of faint black Qi had started to form. The golden horn on his forehead also appeared to be an inch shorter than the day before.

Wen Tianren gloomily scowled, but his heart brimmed with

furious alarm as a faint trace of dread began to take hold.

When he had taunted Han Li that he would only be able to withstand the flames for an hour at most, he had been exaggerating. Knowing precisely how powerful the Divine Golden flames were, he had honestly believed that it would've been difficult for Han Li to persevere for even half an hour. As such, he had been willing to expend a bit of his Origin Qi to eliminate Han Li and prevent him from becoming an even greater problem in the future.

But an hour later, Han Li still showed no signs of wavering, somewhat surprising Wen Tianren.

When it had reached two hours, Wen Tianren was alarmed to find that Han Li had yet to turn to ash.

After four hours, Wen Tianren had started to feel trepidation after seeing how Han Li still endured.

He faintly felt that he had made a mistake, as Han Li hadn't shown any fear at the prospect of contesting his magic power with Wen Tianren's own. It was clear that Han Li either possessed some kind of item that allowed him to quickly replenish his magic power or had some other mysterious ability. According to what he knew, the only item that could allow this kind of replenishment of magic power was the extremely rare Myriad Year Spirit Milk. Could it be that Han Li truly possessed some?

Wen Tianren quickly found his guesses to be true.

However, he had reached the point where he could no longer afford to stop. With a majority of his apex devil incarnations already eliminated and his unrestrained use of the Golden Mirrors of Eight Gates, he had greatly exhausted his cultivation. If he were to let Han Li go, it wasn't likely for him to win.

However, Wen Tianren was aware that given how rare the Myriad Spirit Milk was, ordinary cultivators couldn't possibly

possess all that much. As a result, he had resolved himself to continue to exhaust his true essence and continue his attempt to roast Han Li in the Divine Golden Flames.

The current damage to his true essence would take at least thirty years of secluded cultivation to repair.

With each passing moment, Wen Tianren's complexion grew slightly paler, while the silver light barrier appeared as dense as ever. Wen Tianren wouldn't be able to persist for much longer.

He didn't know how much spirit milk Han Li had left and he was still stuck in a deadlock. As he desperately searched for a method to breakthrough his plight, something eventually came to mind.

Wen Tianren pursed his dry lips and coldly commanded, "Violet Spirit! Go over to where he came from and capture his Dao companion. That person should be at a crucial moment in the ritual and should be incapable of resisting you." His originally refined appearance was now completely gone, revealing a trace of sinister malice.

When Fairy Violet Spirit heard this, her expression changed. This battle was truly beyond the scope of reason. She had originally believed that Han Li wouldn't be able to persist for long, but he had remained unscathed throughout the entire night. Instead, Wen Tianren was now in a difficult situation, much to her surprise.

After hearing his command, she was startled for a moment before realizing his intentions.

This young master of the Starfall Coalition intended to use the woman conducting the ritual to force Han Li into submitting! Since Han Li had agreed to act as her protector, their friendship should run deep. However, being forced to use this shameful method only further illustrated that the disciple of Archsaint Six Paths had truly reached his absolute limit.

Fairy Violet Spirit quickly recovered her ice-cold expression and silently remained in place.

A cold glint ran through Wen Tianren's eyes and he sinisterly said, "What? Could it be that you believe that because of how damage my cultivation is that I cannot take your life? Or is it that you've always wanted to defect from the coalition ever since you were forced to join? Don't forget that the Starfall Coalition rules over half of the Scattered Star Seas, and you are only an early Core Formation cultivator, so where could you possibly run? Obediently follow my orders, and I will turn a blind eye to your disloyal inaction."

Fairy Violet Spirit's expression changed several times before her eyes wandered onto the golden flames, indecision lingering in her heart. During her moment of indecisiveness, streaks of light began to fly over from the distance. As they grew nearer, Fairy Violet Spirit and Wen Tianren recognized them to be the female cultivators and their carriage.

When Wen Tianren saw this, he was greatly elated while Fairy Violet Spirit could only bitterly laugh in her mind.

These Foundation Establishment women hadn't been of any use at the start, but now they would be of pivotal importance.

Before Fairy Violet Spirit could wryly smile, she spotted their panicked expressions as they approached Wen Tianren the moment they arrived.

They looked at the current scene in astonishment and then quickly saluted Wen Tianren. They appeared extremely restless, but still remained silent.

Wen Tianren appearance was harsh and a hostile expression appeared on his face. He coldly chuckled and thought to say something when his face contorted in bewilderment upon looking into the distance.

When the others saw this, they were baffled and curiously turned their heads to look.

“What in the world is that!?” One of them shouted out upon seeing it.

They all saw wisps of black quickly emerge from the ocean at a frightening speed, leaving them all at a loss for words.

“The ghost mist?” After a moment, one of the woman shouted out in terror and immediately flew deeper into the island. At that moment, the others had clearly seen the black wisps. A pitch-black fog had emerged from the sea and was rushing towards them as if it were alive.

Suddenly, the rest of the Foundation Establishment cultivators present had been shocked senseless and fled in complete panic.

Wen Tianren and Fairy Violet Spirit were both aghast at the sudden developments.

Fairy Violet Spirit then stomped down and streaked away while enveloped in red light.

Wen Tianren nervously stared at the golden flames, unsure of what to do. After a cold glint appeared in his eyes, he gritted his teeth and spat a mouthful of blood essence into the flames, instantly causing them to intensify.

Afterwards, he flew into the distance in a flash of golden light while his many maids closely followed after him.

An inconceivable event then occurred before them as the cultivators closest to the ghost mist fell onto the island like downed birds.

This occurred with all cultivators that had drawn too close to the ghost mist. They suddenly lost their bearings in mid-flight and dropped down with deathly pale complexions.

Even their magic tools had been completely deprived of their

spiritual nature.

As for Fairy Violet Spirit and Wen Tianming, they were only able to fly for a short amount of time and barely reach the other edge of the island before their lights had disappeared and they fell into the ocean.

At the time, the golden flames that had remained in the distance wavered for a moment before fizzling out. The eight small mirrors had also returned to their original forms, revealing the silver barrier of light within.

But just as the light barrier was revealed, it dispersed into specks of starlight, revealing an astonished Han Li from within.

Han Li had already seen what had happened with the others, but before he could come overcome his shock and come up with a countermeasure, he felt the magic power in his body become restricted and he began to helplessly fall from the sky.

Chapter 578: Encounter in the Dark

Shock was clear in Han Li's eyes as he fell towards the rocks a hundred meters below him. He abruptly twisted his body and bent his waist at a strange angle before kicking his feet out behind him. This caused him to shoot towards a large tree nearby before steadily coming to stand on one of its branches.

Han Li's head was lined with cold sweat after his near fall. Fortunately, the Shifting Smoke Steps didn't require any spiritual power to use. Otherwise, he would've just met his end by falling to his death. If a Core Formation cultivator were to actually die by falling, they'd become a laughingstock! Of course, many of the nearby Foundation Establishment cultivators weren't as fortunate as Han Li and were certain to have suffered.

When Han Li finally regained his bearings, he heard a series of clangs from the distance. He quickly turned his head in that direction with a changed expression. Sure enough, the clangs came from the two sets of Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords that he hadn't taken into his body. Not far to their side were the eight sided mirrors, the ancient flower basket, and the small silver bell. At the moment, they were all completely devoid of life as if their spiritual nature had disappeared.

Han Li's heart trembled and he hastily tried to release a thread of spiritual sense to inspect the treasures, however his heart immediately grew cold. No matter how hard he tried, his immensely powerful spiritual sense now remained motionless within his body.

Han Li's blood ran cold as both his magic power and spiritual sense were now incapable of being used. He was now no different than an ordinary mortal. Let alone his magic abilities, his storage pouch and his spirit beast pouches were now useless as well.

He turned around and paled upon seeing that the overflowing

black mist had already filled the nearby skies.

With his current speed as a mortal, there would be no chance of him outrunning the ghost mist. After reflecting on the current situation with a gloomy expression, he gritted his teeth and his body blurred. He then appeared beside the lifeless treasures and frantically gathered them all into his arms.

Because he currently had no way of using his storage pouch, he could only hold the items close to his chest. Fortunately, they weren't too large, otherwise Han Li would've been incapable of carrying all of them.

At the same time that Han Li was gathering up the treasures, the endless black fog suddenly descended onto the small island.

Han Li felt an immense attractive force coming in the direction of the mist, and before he even realized what was happening, he was already being sucked in.

Han Li was overwhelmed by shock and shifted his body several times, hoping to use his Shifting Smoke Steps to escape, but it proved completely ineffective. A moment later, he had been absorbed into the pitch-black mist and found himself among several flashes of black lightning that instantly wrapped around his body.

With several muffled booms, Han Li flickered with black light and disappeared without a trace into the fog.

Han Li heard a torrent of countless, strange sounds pour into his mind as the entire world around him blurred and was replaced with absolute darkness.

He felt his body suddenly come to a stop and then fell onto some kind of ground with a muffled thump. The ground was soft and thick, leaving him without the slightest injury, relieving Han Li of his most pressing worry.

He took the opportunity to glance around and found only an

expanse of darkness, but he did manage to smell a strong, fishy scent.

Han Li wordlessly ran his hands over his body to find it sticky and wet with several things poking into him. Upon closer inspection, he discovered that he was lying on a pile of live, squirming fish and prawn.

Han Li frowned and slowly tried to stand up when his head suddenly broke out in pain. At that same time, he felt his limbs turn soft and he became overwhelmed with a sense of vertigo.

Han Li inwardly cursed. Without any magic power protecting his body, he was being subjected to the full aftermath of teleportation. It was likely that he wouldn't be able to stand up for quite a while.

Since this was the case, Han Li emotionlessly lied down on the pile of fish and prawn, saving his strength until he could move his limbs once more.

But right then, yet another ball of black lightning appeared appeared about ten meters above him.

That faint flash of light allowed Han Li to see strange pointed rocks about thirty meters above him, and he was able to make out that this place seemed to be an underground cave. As for the strange lightning, there seemed to be something within it.

Han Li's heart stirred as he gazed at it. After wildly flashing several more times, it disappeared and dropped a pitch-black object straight onto Han Li.

Han Li was startled and wanted to move out of the way, but his body was powerless. He could only watch on as the object fell onto him.

As a result, a soft woman's body fell onto Han Li with a muffled grunt. It seemed she had also been teleported there.

The woman was clearly rattled, and not only did she not realize that Han Li was beneath her, she also crawled on him, grabbing

onto Han Li's hair.

Han Li smirked and let out a faint breath of pain.

"Huh?" The woman now realized that there was another person beneath her, an unfamiliar man. She cried out in alarm and hastily tried to stand, but her body swayed several times before she weakly fell back down.

As a result, she ended up falling onto Han Li once again with her upper body resting on Han Li's stomach. From her look of fright, she seemed to be somewhat young.

"Who are you?" The woman asked with a trembling voice. Her heavy, thumping heart, could be clearly heard in the silent darkness.

The woman's voice was quite pleasant, but since he didn't know the woman and couldn't clearly make out her appearance, Han Li jokingly replied, "Just some guy!"

"Hmph." A trace of resentment appeared within her eyes as she fiercely glared at Han Li. But because her limbs were in pain, she could only raise her neck and turn her head towards Han Li just a bit, as this action didn't seem to take much effort.

However, her pleasant fragrance did reach Han Li's nose, arousing a strange feeling in him. With the addition of her soft, ample body pressing against him, a certain area was unconsciously aroused.

"What are you doing!" The woman immediately felt the change in Han Li's body, and she fiercely glared at him with a shameful expression. However, Han Li saw this action to be quite adorable.

Han Li bitterly laughed and said, "It isn't something that I can control. I have lost my magic power and spiritual sense. While I would like to control my body with my cultivation and calm down my little lord, I've returned to become an ordinary man. I am helpless to do anything about the reaction."

The woman snorted. Although she didn't say anything, she seemed to have heard him. Fortunately, she couldn't move just like Han Li and could do nothing about it, despite her angry humiliation.

The darkness became silent once more, broken only by the breaths of the two.

Han Li felt this experience to be completely unprecedented. There were countless fish and prawn flailing about underneath him, and an unfamiliar, fragrant woman laying on top of him. This situation couldn't be described as anything but absurd!

The woman suddenly broke the silence and asked, "Were you among the fellow cultivators that entered the island?"

"Seems likely, right?" When Han Li heard her, he immediately recalled the dozens of cultivators that had rushed to the small island. It seemed like this woman was one of them.

Doubt flickered within her eyes and she snorted before suspiciously asking, "What is that supposed to mean?"

Han Li smiled and thought to brush off her question with a vague response when disorderly footsteps suddenly sounded as several torches soon appeared in the distance and floated nearby. There appeared to be shadows that were faintly visible beneath the flickering torchlight.

Han Li's heart trembled! There seemed to be people here and they didn't appear to be the other cultivators that had been devoured by the ghost mist.

An instant later, the torches had drawn close to them.

Han Li's eyes narrowed and he was able to clearly see the black silhouettes behind the flames. They were five exceptionally large men that were each at least a whole head taller than Han Li, and appeared to be about forty years of age.

They wore green robes and held a sword-like weapon in their

hands with huge leather bags on their backs and were hastily travelling forward in large strides.

When Han Li saw them, his heart was shaken by fear. As he was guessing the identity of these men, a strand of black hair swept past his face. The woman had turned her head to gaze at them as well, and seemed to be ill at ease from her trembling..

Han Li furrowed his brow and began to move his fingers as a trace of strength had returned. It appeared that he was recovering his strength rather quickly.

Chapter 579: A Place With No Name

A moment after Han Li realized he was regaining control of his body, the torches had grown closer to them, allowing him to see with greater clarity.

The nearby surroundings had been brightened enough to reveal large piles of fish and prawn everywhere. Han Li and the woman happened to be on one of the comparatively larger piles.

The areas further away from them were still pitch-black and couldn't be seen, but the cave appeared exceptionally spacious as no walls could be seen.

When the men carrying torches were about a hundred meters away from Han Li, they stopped and quickly placed their bags onto the ground. With the exception of one person that vigilantly stood guard, the rest of them began to wildly stuff the fish and prawn into their bags.

Han Li was surprised to see this while woman on top of him couldn't help but gasp in surprise, but the men hadn't heard her because of how soft her voice was. Han Li unconsciously turned his gaze to the woman and discovered in the faint glow of red light that the woman had a beautiful face.

The woman immediately noticed Han Li's gaze, and seemed to blush. She turned away, and her face was once again hidden in the darkness. However, her bashful eyes still glinted in the darkness.

Han Li couldn't help but find her actions humorous.

This woman was somewhat odd. When they had yet to see each other's appearance, she was outspoken, direct, and even a bit unruly. Now that he could see her, the initial harshness has disappeared and she immediately grew timid and bashful.

In that instant, they heard a cry of alarm in the distance.

The man on guard suddenly turned around and harshly

whispered, “Not good! Scatter! The Firescale Beast is about to arrive!”

Suddenly, the men that were gathering the fish immediately tossed the bags onto their backs and madly scrabbled in another direction. All that was left behind were the flickering torches illuminating the darkness.

At that moment, several hisses could be heard from within the darkness as if something had discovered the men. Several quick thumps then sounded out.

Several fire-red, meter-long silhouettes leapt from the darkness and quickly disappeared with a blur.

For a instant, Han Li was able to clearly see the appearances of the Firescale Beasts. The beasts had a sinister appearance with red scales and a mouthful of razor sharp fangs.

In the blink of an eye, silence once again covered the cave.

Han Li let out a long breath of relief as it seemed that the strange beasts hadn’t discovered the two of them, providing a silver lining for an otherwise dismal situation.

Not long after the beasts disappeared, Han Li could weakly form a fist with both hands. Soon he finally recovered control over his body and could move well enough to hold onto the woman and slowly stand up.

While being held in his arms, the woman whispered with a blush, “Re... Release me. I will recover soon enough.”

Han Li glanced at the woman and indifferently said, “If you don’t mind squirming around with the fish on the ground, I’ll let you go.”

When the woman heard this, she lowered her head and glanced at the squirming fish on the ground with a trace of hesitation. In the end, she chose to remain silent.

At that moment, Han Li jumped off the pile of fish with the woman in his grasp and walked in the direction of the abandoned torches. Although he didn't know what or where this forsaken place was, it would prove rather troublesome if they didn't have any light.

Han Li crouched down and picked up a torch, and wore a pensive expression after glancing around.

A short moment later, the blushing woman whispered, "Please release me. I can move now."

When Han Li heard this, he silently relaxed his arm and the woman gracefully landed on her feet. After quickly patting down her clothes, she also pick up a torch and examined their surroundings.

After a moment, Han Li suddenly headed off in the direction that the group of men had arrived from.

When the woman saw this, she was alarmed and hastily asked, "Where are you going?"

Han Li replied without turning his head, "I'm not going to wait here for the beasts to return. It would be better to find somewhere safe for now."

When the woman heard this, she wore an expression of fright and quickly followed after Han Li.

Han Li remained silent when he heard this and continued on his way.

After only walking a few steps, Han Li stopped and used the torch to illuminate the ground, revealing the men's footprints.

The woman was caught off guard and nearly ran into Han Li. She was left slightly bewildered and whispered, "What's wrong?"

Han Li didn't answer her. Instead, he crouched down and brought a handful of sand to his nose. He revealed an odd

expression after taking a sniff.

“There’s a dense smell of blood. This isn’t a good sign!” Han Li expressionlessly said this before continuing to follow the men’s footsteps.

The woman was startled by what he said and quickly followed after Han Li.

After the time it took to finish a meal, they eventually spotted a glitter of blue light in the distance.

Han Li narrowed his eyes at the sight and quickened his steps.

He soon discovered that the sparkling blue light marked an exit from this black expanse. Although it was only about three meters wide, it was more than enough for a person to pass through.

When the two saw this, they quickly walked through it with roused spirits.

In the instant they arrived at the opening, a white light flashed before Han Li and eight flawless swords quickly appeared against his neck. A hoarse voice coldly said, “Who are you? Where are Ah Hu and the others? Are you new arrivals?”

Han Li’s heart stirred upon seeing that he was surrounded by over twenty young men and woman. Each of whom held a strange sparkling white blade, and wore the same strange green robes as the men from before. They were all gazing at Han Li with differing expressions.

As for the beautiful woman following him, she had been surrounded as well and didn’t dare to move.

Han Li rubbed his nose and wryly smiled, “I imagine that we are what you consider to be new arrivals! Do outsiders often appear here?”

When the middle-aged man heard Han Li, his expression relaxed but his voice still remained cold, “I would’ve guessed it if you

hadn't said anything as your strange clothes are something only outsiders would wear. However, it's quite fortunate for you to encounter us. After all, a majority of outsiders meet their ends in the stomach of the umbra beasts without ever realizing what was happening."

He then waved his hand and the youths withdrew their swords.

Han Li rubbed his neck and glanced at the weapons with a trace of astonishment.

When those blades were touching his neck, he felt an astonishing burning sensation as if they were all made of scorching hot iron. It was a truly weird experience.

Han Li then swept his gaze around and discovered that they were in front of a small stone mountain. It appeared that they had just left the heart of the stone mountain. When he gazed into the distance, there was an endless yellow desert.

He then raised his head to the sky and felt an even greater shock.

He saw pitch-black clouds covering the sky. They appeared endless and continuously arced with deep blue lightning, causing the sky to shine with a faint blue light. It was all stranger than anything Han Li had imagined.

Before Han Li finished observing his surroundings, the lean middle-aged man frowned and asked, "Did you encounter anyone when you arrived? They would be my companions!"

Han Li immediately answered without hesitation, "I saw a group of men, however, they were chased down by a few beasts. They ran off in another direction."

The lean man grew nervous and he unconsciously tightened his grasp on the blade, "Beasts? What kind?"

"I heard those men call them Firescale Beasts."

The lean man relaxed and calmly said, "Firescale Beasts? That's

good. Ah Hu and the others should have no problem dealing with them. But just to be sure, Fan Li, bring a group of people inside and help them. Then take them through the nearest alternative exit.”

A towering dark man wordlessly brought a group of people into the cave.

Chapter 580: Tall Walls

The lean man turned his head toward Han Li and the woman and indifferently said, “I’m not sure whether I should say your luck is good or bad. You actually ran into an eruption of Spirit Extinguishing Qi! This causes far more tears in space to appear, and even experts are incapable of escaping them. But as a result, the umbra beasts that normally lay inside the mountain hollow had left. Otherwise, you would’ve immediately be torn apart upon falling inside.”

When Han Li heard this, his heart sank, but his expression remained unchanged. “I hope you’ll forgive me for being so bold, but could your esteemed self tell us exactly where we are? From your tone, it seems this place is quite dangerous.”

The lean man examined the two’s clothing and saw that they didn’t seem to be ordinary people and wryly smiled, “Dangerous? Hehe! That’s about right. Regardless of whatever identities or statuses you may have held on the outside, here in the Umbra Realm, you’re just people that need to struggle to survive. If you can’t move or make yourself useful, you will end up as umbra beast food.”

Han Li frowned and wanted to ask more questions but the lean man impatiently waved his hand, “We’re pressed for time. The explanations will have to wait until after we return to the village. In just a moment, the umbra beasts will return to their nests and we’ll have to quickly block this secret entrance so that we can use it again in the future.” After he said this, he turned to the people behind him and started harshly giving them commands.

The men and women began to grab nearby stones and started to hurriedly stack them tightly against the hole.

The lean man gazed at the Yin clouds in the sky and his face darkened. “Let’s go. If everything goes smoothly, Ah Hu and the

others will meet us on the way. But if we dawdle, the Yin winds will appear and we won't be able to return." After saying this, he turned around and left as the rest of people closely followed after him without a word. None of them ever called out to Han Li or the woman.

When Han Li saw this, an odd expression flickered through his eyes as he began to ponder over the current situation.

The beautiful woman beside Han Li watched as the group grew distant. Seeing that Han Li appeared pensive, she couldn't help but worriedly ask, "Should we follow them?"

Without any magic power, she had turned into a frail and bewildered mortal. Since Han Li appeared calm this entire time, she had instinctively begun to rely on him.

Han Li raised his head and calmly said, "There's no reason not to, so let's go take a look at their so-called village. Perhaps we'll think of something once we're there and are able to recover our magic power." He then headed in the direction the others had gone with large strides.

The woman let out a breath of relief and followed after him.

"Ah, yes. I still don't know your name. My surname is Han, I am a vagrant cultivator."

"I am Mei Ning. I was together with my brother when we were sucked into the ghost mist, but now he isn't here." A trace of worry appeared on her face when she mentioned her brother.

Han Li calmly said, "That's to be expected. The black lightning appears to have the power of random teleportation. Your brother must've teleported elsewhere. Otherwise, why would only the two of us teleport there despite the many cultivators around the island? If you search for him, you'll find him eventually."

When the woman heard this, she felt relieved and her curiosity towards Han Li was piqued. His appearance was rather unfamiliar

and she was certain that she had never seen him before. She tentatively guessed that he was a cultivator that had approached the island from a different direction.

She thought to ask more questions of Han Li, but she hesitated after realizing that they didn't have a particularly close relationship, and ended up keeping silent.

As the two hurried after the group of green-robed people, she pondered about the pros and cons of inquiring about him further. Although they didn't have any magic power, cultivators possessed bodies of purified essence that were far more capable than those of ordinary mortals.

Seeing that the two were able to follow after them without difficulty, a strange expression appeared in the lean man's eyes, but instead of saying anything, he lowered his head and sped up.

The others behind him quickened their pace in response.

Han Li was somewhat surprised to see that these people were far more vigorous than ordinary mortals. Although their bodies didn't seem to hold a superior level of inner strength, they clearly cultivated some shallow martial arts. It seemed that martial arts would prove quite useful here.

Nevertheless, Han Li still had misgivings from the ghost mist that had previously occurred.

From the records he had looked through, although the ghost fog was frightful, it had never been as disastrous as what had just occurred. There wasn't even an opportunity for anyone to escape. Before he had even touched the ghost mist, the entirety of his magic power had already been sealed. It had been truly terrifying.

If each appearance of the ghost mist was that disastrous, then even Nascent Soul cultivators wouldn't be able to escape it. But in the previous appearances of the ghost mist, there were many cultivators who were able to escape from it, even low grade

cultivators had.

However, Han Li felt somewhat suspicious about what the lean man had referred to as the so-called Spirit Extinguishing Qi. From its name, it was certain to have something to do with why his spiritual sense and magic power were currently restricted.

They were truly unlucky to have encountered such a particularly dreadful ghost mist that had managed to captured everyone present. He reckoned that those that survived the teleportation would be found scattered across the other corners of this land.

Just as Han Li thought this, the lean man suddenly stopped and turned his head in a different direction while the rest of his party had followed suit. Far off into the desert, a yellow dragon could be seen rushing towards them through surging clouds of sand.

“It’s Ah Hu and the others!” One of the youths shouted in delight as the others became excited. The lean man nodded his head and revealed a trace of relief, but his smile soon froze when he heard a series of sharp roars from the yellow dragon.

The lean man furiously yelled with a distorted expression, “Everyone, quickly go and help them! They are being pursued by umbra beasts.” He took out the long white blade at his waist and led the charge forward.

The rest of the party came to a sudden realization and each of them brandished their blades as they followed suit.

Han Li stood in place, and merely stared at the yellow dragon in the distance with an odd expression.

The lean man’s party had just reached the yellow dragon when it abruptly stopped and roared before bursting into clouds of yellow mist.

The party loudly yelled as they entered the dense smoke, and shouts of all pitches and tones were intertwined. After the time it took to finish a cup of tea, their voices eventually quieted down.

After a short moment, a series of cheers came from within the yellow mist, and the men and woman all emerged with their bodies splattered with beast blood. It was difficult to tell if any of them had sustained any injuries, but each of them wore a smile of pleasant surprise.

When they returned, they were joined by the burly men that Han Li had seen within the mountain. They were still carrying the huge bags on their back.

When they spotted Han Li and Mei Ning, they appeared somewhat confused, but after the lean man whispered something to them, their expression brightened and paid them no further mind.

The group quickly marched on with the new arrivals. Two hours later, they had reached an expanse of pitch-black stone that interrupted the desolate sandscape.

Just like the desert from before, Han Li was unable to see the end of this expanse of black stone. However, the black stones were all strangely shaped and their deep shade of black left Han Li with an eerie feeling of discomfort.

But when the others saw this place, they let out long breaths of relief and wore relaxed expressions.

At that moment, the Yin clouds in the sky had begun to restlessly move about and the blue flashes of lightning had become more frequent. Occasionally, they would directly strike an area nearby, causing a pit to appear among the stones.

Han Li and Mei Ning were startled by the sudden turn of events, but the others seemed accustomed to it. They simply walked into the stony areas with quick strides.

The lean man then shouted, "Everyone, quicken your pace! The village is about to close their doors. Let's avoid being trapped outside!" Afterwards, the group of people dashed forward and ran

with all their might.

Han Li and Mei Ning glanced at each other. Although they didn't know what was going on, they didn't dare to fall behind.

Following their lead, they made several turns throughout the expanse of stone before suddenly arriving at an open area.

The spacious area had lofty stone walls that were as black as could be. Not only were these stone walls all carved out of massive boulders that were at least three meters wide and ten meters tall, but they extended out for several kilometers. Additionally, about every ten meters along the walls, a sharp spike of hardwood struck out from the wall, making for a sinister appearance.

Currently, the group of people were heading in the direction of an imposing wooden gate with over ten men with white pikes standing guard on either side.

When these guards saw the lean man's party approach, they loudly yelled at them with excitement.

With a huge rumble, the gate slowly opened, allowing them inside.

Chapter 581: A Huge Beast Attacks

Although Han Li and Mei Ning were new arrivals, the guards merely glanced at them without asking any questions. Instead, they surrounded the returnees and excitedly asked them a few questions. As a result, the large men gave them a glance at the fish and prawn in their bags before the guards cried out in surprise.

Han Li furrowed his brows at the sight. It seemed that food was a scarce resource here.

Soon after, Han Li swept his eyes across the entire village.

The entire village was within the protection of the tall stone walls, and all of its buildings were crudely carved cubes made from the same pitch-black stone as the walls. There was also a small stone platform built at the center of the village that was several times taller than the other buildings. Additionally, the top of the platform seem to emit a faint purple fog that permeated through the entire village. It seemed to completely absorb any of the blue lightning that happened to strike the village. The purple fog was undoubtedly some kind of spell formation, but Han Li was unable to perceive the slightest spiritual Qi inside the stone walls. Instead, he only felt a cold Yin energy lingering in the air.

Although his spiritual sense was still trapped within his body, he could still keenly sense spiritual Qi. Han Li was bewildered as to why this was the case.

The lean man's group had entered the village and already arrived at a large hall near the platform. There were a group of people outside the hall that were gesturing and whispering with the lean man's group when one of them looked in Han Li's direction with a deep gaze.

Han Li felt his heart tremble. That person possessed the deepest inner strength of anyone he had encountered in this land.

Were it in the outside world, Han Li could've easily killed him with a twirl of his finger and ignored him. But as Han Li was now, he would have to strive his hardest to deal with him. At that moment, the lean man had approached the group of people and said something to them before turning around and pointing at Han Li and Mei Ning. The group then turned their gazes to Han Li.

Han Li remained silent and revealed no fear, but to his side, Mei Ning revealed nervousness from not knowing what they had in mind for them.

The lean man beckoned to the two and said, "You two, come over. The village elders have some questions for you."

Han Li nodded his head and calmly walked over with Mei Ning in tow.

The group of people that had been standing outside had already turned around and entered the hall, and Han Li soon followed.

A plump old man that sat at the center of the hall gazed at them with a kind expression and said, "Please, sit. Since we are all human, we will naturally do our best to aid one another. However, there is much that is different in this world from the outside. How about you two first introduce yourselves before I start introducing you to this land?"

The others sat down at his side, and the one who had glared at Han Li outside the hall were among them as well. He had narrow eyes, a hostile expression and pale skin. At that moment, his spirited eyes had swept across Han Li and the beautiful Mei Ning behind him. Although he was silent, a peculiar expression flickered through his eyes.

Han Li casually smiled and calmly replied, "There isn't much to say about us. We encountered the ghost mist at sea and were drawn here by it. As for my previous identity, what use is it here? There is no point in talking about it."

The old man smiled upon hearing Han Li's vague answer.

He examined the two with narrowed eyes before saying, "You two must be cultivators, so there is no point in concealing this." With that said, the old man's gaze dropped down to the bulging storage pouch at Han Li's waist.

Han Li's expression remained unchanged but he was inwardly shocked. As for Mei Ning, her expression grew pale with worry.

"You two don't need to be scared. Although there aren't many cultivators among us, we are far more happy to have you join this village than we would be with ordinary people. However, you two will be incapable of using magic or spiritual power in the Umbra Realm. The only powers you'll be able to use are a few crude martial arts and umbra energy."

"Umbra energy?" Han Li asked with a bewildered expression.

The old man twirled his beard and slowly said, "That's right. It is somewhat similar to magic power, but it cannot be used to cast magic techniques. However, cultivators are able to use the inner cores of umbra beasts to deploy a few small scale spell formations. We have much use for them in our village. And even if you aren't proficient in spell formations, cultivators' bodies are far stronger than those of ordinary men. They will certainly be great helpers."

After a moment of thought, Han Li asked, "Your esteemed self seems to understand much about us cultivators. Are there other cultivators in the village?"

The plump old man smirked and said, "Of course there are, but they only number about six. This old man happens to be one of them. When I was sucked into the ghost mist, I was only a Foundation Establishment cultivator."

A trace of astonishment flickered through Han Li's eyes, but when he thought to ask more questions, the entire hall violently rumbled. In the distance, there seemed to be a huge monster

charging at the village.

The expressions of the people inside the hall had greatly changed, and they no longer paid any attention to Han Li. They all immediately walked out and Han Li soon followed after them with a hesitant expression. The village elders were commanding several hundred robust youths to all rush up the thick walls with pikes in most of their hands, while a few of them carried crude bows.

Although their expressions were all tense, they acted with perfect discipline as if they had already experienced this many times.

Han Li's gaze turned in the direction of a very loud rumble coming from outside the stone wall. Although he could feel the tremors grow even more astonishing, nothing else had yet to happen.

Han Li rubbed his chin and expectantly glanced around for moment. He then walked over to a tall building nearby and took advantage of the chaos to jump off a wall and easily climbed onto the stone building's roof. From the top of the building, Han Li was able to see what was happening.

In the distance, he saw that the stone and sand were violently scraping through the air on a bewildering black wind while a black frost spread across the ground in its wake. It appeared amazingly cold.

This seemed to be the Yin wind that the lean man had spoken of previously. It truly wasn't something that ordinary mortals could handle.

However, as the Yin wind reached about three hundred meters from the village, it began to disappear, accompanied by heavy tremors as a large object dropped onto the ground. Although it was still a good distance away, an astonishing aura could be felt from it. Soon, a forty meter tall black figure emerged from the winds.

When Han Li saw the black figure's true appearance, he felt his

blood turn cold.

At first glance, the black figure appeared to be a gigantic grey ape, except that the beast had four eyes and a pair of wings emerging between its ribs. It carried a log of jet-black wood in one arm as it madly charged towards the village, while its four eyes were radiating with crimson light and emitted a powerful, bloodthirsty aura.

After the beast's true form was revealed, many people started to loudly shout, "It's an Insidious Mauler! Quickly, send over the great shields!"

In an instant, a large number of women, children, and elderly began to deliver shields of all kinds to the walls. But soon after, they began to flusteredly run away from the walls as the huge beast came within three hundred meters of the village. The tremors caused by the beast's footsteps had left Han Li bewildered. It appeared as if the stone walls would be taken down by the tremors long before the beast even reached them.

But in the next moment, huge tentacles were formed from several strands of dense violet fog and rigidly fastened onto the huge beast's feet. As a result, the huge beast lost its footing and fell in front of the stone wall, causing everyone in the garrison to lose their balance for a moment from the resulting tremors.

Han Li unconsciously turned his gaze to the tall platform with astonishment, and shockingly discovered that there were now four people sitting cross-legged on the platform. Their bodies were covered in a faint layer of purple Qi as if they were utilizing a technique.

'This is umbra energy?' Han Li's heart stirred.

In the following instant, an order was shouted, "Attack!"

A large number of pikes and arrows were shot at the huge beast like rain, completely enveloping it.

As Han Li watched this, his heart thumped with excitement.

Chapter 582: The Umbra Realm

Knowing that things were far from good, the huge beast loudly roared and released an icy Yin wind from its mouth.

Not only were the incoming arrows all blown away by the Yin winds, but they were even covered in a layer of glossy black ice. They had all fallen to the ground without even touching the beast.

As for the heavier pikes, although they managed to fall onto the huge beast's body, the Yin wind had greatly reduced their power, and they were barely able to cause a few superficial wounds. All they had managed to achieve was to further enrage the huge beast.

In its fury, the beast's eyes began to flicker with crimson light. With a bang, its neck fur began to harden and grow erect, making for a sinister appearance.

When Han Li saw this, his mind grew blank. The huge beast lowered its head and the erect hair instantly transformed into countless black streaks that shot at the stone wall.

The wall's garrison seemed to already know that this would happen. Although their faces appeared nervous, they shouted a rallying cry as they raised their shields to meet the attack.

Sharp cracks sounded out as the black streaks struck the shields.

Although the black streaks managed to deeply pierce into the shields, a majority of them managed to successfully block the attack. As for the few garrison members that were struck, they were immediately thrown off the wall by the force of the strike. It was unknown whether or not they had survived.

The remaining garrison were too busy to look after the injured. Instead, another order to attack was shouted, and a rain of pikes and arrows immediately followed. But just like the previous time, the huge beast managed to knock most of the projectiles away with the Yin winds. However, it seemed the beast was only able to

harden the hair on its neck, so although it continued to loudly shout in response to the attacks, it was only able to crawl forward as it struggled. It no longer had any methods to attack back. As for the tentacles formed from the purple mist, they continued to hold its legs firmly in place without a single moment of weakness.

As the attacks continued for another six waves, the huge beast seemed to have eventually exhausted its Yin wind and couldn't continue its resistance.

From that moment, the arrows and pikes struck with increasingly greater frequency, piercing into the huge beast's body.

As this continued, the beast sustained minor injuries and its furious roars grew more spirited as it continuously pounded the huge black log into the ground, filling it with holes.

As Han Li witnessed the beast's immense strength and durability, he unconsciously became somewhat fearful of it.

As if it were planned in advance, a squad of particularly burly and vigorous men quickly rushed onto the stone walls. Apart from the several twelve meter long pikes they held in their arms, they carried nothing else.

These people each began to lift the pikes in a practiced motion as soon as they arrived on the walls and fiercely launched them in the huge beast's direction.

These powerful shots tore through the air, leaving Han Li surprised by the wind they produced.

Each of these men had to possess powerful inner strength to be able to toss the pikes with such ease, while having each pike sail through the skies with immense speed and power.

In the following instant, bowl-sized splatters of blood began to appear all over the beast's body. All of the strikes were to great effect, nailing the beast to the ground. The beast's original ferocity

had completely disappeared without a trace.

Huge cheers erupted from the walls with everyone wearing a face of relief. The purple coils of smoke then disappeared without a trace.

A group of people then excitedly rushed towards the wooden gate with blades in their hands, intending on finishing off the beast. As for the others, they had already started to tend to the wounded.

But before the wooden gate fully opened, the crestfallen beast suddenly roared with a final burst of strength and waved its arm, thrusting the huge thirty-meter-long log into the sky. It carried an astonishing pressure as it directly flew in the direction of the village.

Seeing that the huge beast was on the verge of dying, a few of the villagers had happily rushed out. However, they cried out in shock as they saw the log flying in their direction. But in the following instant, a silhouette had blurred before them and directly shot towards the huge log in the air. With a roar, the person fiercely struck at the center of the log with both his arms.

With a loud crack, the black log flew off in another direction, falling in an area without people.

This person then lightly landed on the ground in a relaxed and confident manner. He was the middle-aged man from earlier with a harsh expression and pale face.

The villagers that had been saved greatly sighed in relief and immediately spoke to their savior, repeatedly thanking him. However, the pale man merely waved at them with an indifferent expression before returning back to his original position.

A trace of astonishment then flickered within Han Li's eyes. After the pale man had rescued these people, he had carelessly shot a cold glance in his direction. Although Han Li didn't know what he meant by it, it clearly wasn't positive by any means.

Han Li frowned and just as he pondered what the man had meant by it, the wooden gate opened and several tens of robust men charged out of the village to finish off the huge beast.

However, it didn't end after the beast was dead. With their long blades, they cleaved open the beast's skull and fumbled around within the blood and gore until they took out green, thumb-sized gem. The group cheered after they found it, and those that were watching cheered along with them.

Han Li blinked, suddenly feeling that the green gem seemed somewhat familiar. After lowering his head for a moment of thought, he suddenly recalled what it was.

During his trip to Heavenvoid Hall, he had encountered many similar green gems in the wreckage of the puppets. Could they be the same material?

After watching for just a moment more, Han Li wordlessly leapt off the stone building.

The plump old man and the other elders had already returned to the hall, and Han Li still had a bellyful of questions he wanted to ask them.

When Mei Ning saw Han Li returning to the hall, she followed him in with a lowered head. After witnessing the previous battle, she realized the dangers of this place and became worried.

When Han Li entered the hall, the elders had already returned to their seats.

When the plump old man saw Han Li enter, he smiled and thought to say something when a tall, robust man quickly entered with the green gem in his hand.

The robust man placed the gem on the table in front of the elders and respectfully said, "Great Elders, this is the Insidious Mauler's umbra beast gem. Please take a look at it."

The old man glanced at the gem and happily said, "We've put you

all through quite a bit of trouble. Before this, we sent you all out to take advantage of the eruption of Spirit Extinguishing Qi and you succeeded in bringing back fish. In a moment, we will bestow you all with great rewards.”

“Many thanks, Elders!” The robust man wore an expression of delighted surprise and withdrew from the hall with an expression of satisfaction.

Han Li stood to the side and watched all this with a detached expression.

“The strange beast that you two witnessed was an umbra beast known as the Insidious Mauler. It must’ve been quite a shock to you two! Although the Umbra Realm spans only about a hundred kilometers, there are demon beasts, humans, and all sorts of umbra beasts within.”

With slight astonishment, Han Li asked, “There are demon beasts here?”

The old man bitterly smiled and paused for a moment before answering, “Of course. Whenever there’s a tear in space, both cultivators and demon beasts are brought here all the same.”

“The demon beasts here aren’t able to use their demon arts, but they’ve all developed their bodies with great effort and have incredible power. They aren’t an existence that humans or umbra beasts can provoke. Fortunately, they only guard a few specific areas and feast on umbra beasts. They don’t pose much of a threat to us humans since they are unlikely to emerge; umbra beasts, however, are different. They are born from the umbra Qi of this place and are innately fond of devouring human flesh. Every so often, powerful umbra beasts will come knocking at human villages. Although a majority of villages are capable of repelling them, smaller villages are occasionally defeated and completely wiped out. Conversely, the umbra beasts are endless and another Insidious Mauler will condense and reemerge into the Umbra

Realm soon enough.”

After a moment of silence, Han Li slowly asked, “From what you’ve said, it seems that this isn’t the only human village. There are others?”

“Of course. Although there aren’t many, there’s about eight other villages scattered throughout the Umbra Realm. Food is scarce here so apart from a few pieces of fertile land, the rest is barren from the heavy umbra Qi. A majority of the umbra beasts possess poisonous flesh, and apart from some special varieties, we are incapable of consuming them. Although demon beasts are able to consume them, humans would perish upon eating them. As such, only useful people are allowed to live in villages. Anybody who is useless will be driven away and have their lives run their natural course!” The old man’s last words were spoken with an icy tone.

Chapter 583: Stomach of the Rahu

Han Li frowned and let out a long breath before asking, “Your esteemed self called this place the Umbra Realm. Does this place have any relation with the Netherworld from legend? Is there any way to restore the magic power that was restricted? Most importantly, I wish to return to the outside. I have no intention of staying here. Would your esteemed self happen to know of a way out?”

The plump old man shook his head and sighed, “A majority of the humans in this world were born here, and most of humans that are brought here by the ghost mist end up devoured by umbra beasts. Only a small minority were lucky enough to reach a village. As for my own close friends and family, they are all on the outside. If it were so easy to return, why would us survivors from the outside world remain here and continue living day after day on the verge of crisis?

“As for whether or not this place has anything to do with the Netherworld, who could possibly know? However, there is a senior that has stayed here far longer than I have, and he holds the belief that this area is a crevice between the human world and the Netherworld. As a result, there is a dense concentration of umbra Qi, but there are no excessively powerful umbra beasts that take form.

“Additionally, there is a farfetched rumor being spread around by a few cultivators that believe this world has nothing to do with the Netherworld. These cultivators believe that this world is actually the stomach of a legendary devil beast, the Rahu. Legend says that the Rahu is capable of both devouring stars and tearing through space and that it is fond of concealing itself on the seafloor, only emerging to feed itself every so often. That is supposed to explain how the strange mist emerges from the sea and can link the two worlds together.”

Han Li's expression greatly changed when he heard this, "The Rahu? How could that be possible, it makes far less sense than the Netherworld. I don't believe that this entire world is contained inside a devil beast."

The old man leisurely said, "That's right. When I first heard of this, I was shocked as well. Although it is hard to swallow, there is still a possibility it's true. If the tears in space appeared periodically, then one might expect that they all appear at the same place. However, this isn't the case. Whenever new arrivals are sucked into the Umbra Realm, they all come from different areas in the seas that others haven't heard of. For example, I came from a small island in the South Bay Province of the Great Court of Jin. As for the other cultivators, they've arrived from places such as the Five Dragon Seas, the Heavenly Sand Continent, and the Scattered Star Seas as well. Nobody recognizes where anybody else has come from, but here we are all the same."

"The Great Court of Jin? You're a cultivator of the State of Jin?" A trace of astonishment flickered within Han Li's eyes. When he was in the Heavenly South Region, he had heard much of the esteemed State of Jin.

The old man's eyes brightened, "Could it be that you also came from the Great Court of Jin?"

Han Li shook his head and said, "No, but I have heard quite a bit about it. I know it to be an immensely large country, and I had always wanted to visit it but never had the opportunity."

The old man revealed a trace of disappointment and said, "So its like that! That is somewhat regretful. This old man truly wishes for an opportunity to return!"

The old man then radiantly smiled and chuckled, "Fellow Daoist would've known what a true world of cultivation was had he visited our Great Jin. To the best of my knowledge, there is no other cultivator world that compares in scope or activity of ours. It

wouldn't be a lie to say that the Great State of Jin is a sacred site for cultivators.”

Han Li rubbed his nose but despite the bitter smile on his face, his heart stirred in response to the old man's words.

The old man smiled and chuckled, “This old man has strayed off topic. As for your previous question about whether or not there's a method of restoring one's magic power, I can only tell you should abandon your hopes while you remain in the Umbra Realm. In addition to umbra Qi, there's also Spirit Extinguishing Qi in the air as well. It is periodically released from the depths by eruptions, spreading it throughout the sky. So long as cultivators are within its range, their magic power and abilities are completely sealed. It is quite fortunate that you were brought over here during an eruption of Spirit Extinguishing Qi.”

Han Li suddenly felt gloomy upon hearing all of this. Were it not for the eruption of Spirit Extinguishing Qi, he wouldn't have even been brought here by some trifling ghost mist.

After a moment of silence, Han Li resentfully said, “Since we were able to enter, then there must be a way of leaving. I refuse to believe that there isn't.”

The old man twirled his beard and unhurriedly said, “Well, technically there is a way out, but it requires assistance.”

A trace of joy appeared in Han Li's mind and he hastily asked, “What is it?”

As Mei Ning heard this her expression fluctuated with roused spirits.

“It's...” The old man revealed a hesitant expression.

Han Li's expression stirred and an odd emotion flickered within his eyes, “What? Could it be inconvenient for you to say?”

The old man grimaced as he looked at the two. His eyes then narrowed and he said with a deep tone, “Please don't

misunderstand. There is no point in concealing it. Although I do want two more cultivators to join the village, I'm not making it deliberately difficult for you. I am merely afraid you two Fellow Daoists will impatiently rush out and throw your lives away."

After Han Li heard this, he immediately chuckled, but his smile soon disappeared as he solemnly said, "Be at ease. Although I appear young, I've cultivated for many years and am disinclined to make any rash actions. If it truly is impossible, I won't pointlessly risk my life. However, I would still like to hear of the method."

After some consideration, the plump old man replied, "Since that is the case, this old man won't conceal it any longer." He then walked to the hall's entrance and raised his head to the sky with a pensive expression.

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Mei Ning bit her red lips and asked, "Brother Han, what do we do? Could it be that you truly wish to climb Stormwind Mountain?" Her current complexion was extremely pale. After she heard the method to return, she began to despair, believing that it was impossible to achieve.

Han Li gazed at the sky and indifferently said, "I haven't given it much thought yet, but I do know that I will be giving it a try eventually."

When Mei Ning heard this, her expression stirred. Just as she thought to say something, someone suddenly approached them. It was a sixteen year old, dark-skinned youth with a curious expression.

The youth stared at them and elegantly said, "So you are the two new arrivals. I've received orders from the elders to bring you two to your residences. Since you have just arrived, three days of food will be given to you free of charge. However, later you will have to undertake assignments or else you will be ejected from the village."

Han Li nonchalantly said, "That's fine. Lead the way!"

The youth nodded his head and set off without another word. Shortly after, the youth brought the two of them to a neat stone building in a corner of the village.

When Mei Ning arrived in the room and saw that there was only one wide bed, her face suddenly grew scarlet.

The woman hesitantly asked the youth, "There is only one bed here?"

The youth blinked and curiously asked, "If a man and a woman are together, then wouldn't they want to sleep in one bed?"

Having heard that, Mei Ning's blush grew more intense. She thought to give an explanation, but she was unable to muster any words for the time being.

At that moment, Han Li had finished examining the building's exterior and indifferently said, "We will be sleeping separately. Please bring us another bed."

The youth curled his lips. Although he was somewhat unwilling, he agreed and walked out.

After the youth walked out, Han Li promptly said, "Go ahead and take a rest first. I'm going to take a look around the village!" When Mei Ning heard him, she wore a blank expression and silently nodded.

Without any further hesitation, Han Li walked out of the building and glanced around before heading towards the center platform. He was greatly interested in the methods to control umbra energy.

There was no one standing guard nearby the stone platform, so Han Li was able to easily approach it. With its great height, the lack of stairs made it appear even more towering than he had expected.

Han Li walked several times around the stone platform and easily climbed onto it.

Chapter 584: Stone Talismans and Beast Crystals

Han Li walked around on the platform and curiously examined a stone disc with a trace of astonishment.

The disc was over three meters wide and was placed flat onto the platform. There were many strange decorative patterns carved into it along with many profound talisman characters. Although there was no one currently operating it, it continuously emitted a purple mist that spiralled into the sky and covered the village.

As a proficient scholar of the Dao of formation spells, Han Li began to study the stone disc with narrowed eyes.

Not longer after, his expression fluttered before revealing a trace of enlightenment. He then furrowed his brow as he sunk deep into thought.

While Han Li was completely entranced, he suddenly heard an unfamiliar voice from behind him, “Could it be that Fellow Daoist has obtained some profound insights?”

Han Li’s heart was shaken and he inwardly cursed in surprise upon realizing that someone had unknowingly appeared behind him. It would’ve been quite dangerous if they had meant him any harm. However, it wasn’t entirely Han Li’s fault for his carelessness as he was accustomed to having his spiritual sense surround his body. He was still slowly adapting to the loss of his magic power and spiritual sense.

Han Li grew inwardly vigilant and wordlessly turned around.

A white haired old man with long hair stood before Han Li. His face was full of wrinkles, but his eyes exuded a strong spirit, and he was currently looking at Han Li with a wide smile.

Han Li hesitantly asked, “Are you a cultivator?” He could no longer tell due to the loss of his spiritual sense.

The old man smiled and replied, “I am Bao Huanzi, an old cultivator from the Five Dragon Seas. You must be one of the two newly arrived cultivators.”

‘The Five Dragon Seas?’ Han Li’s mind stirred with interest upon hearing the name.

Han Li’s expression relaxed and he said, “So it turned out to be Fellow Daoist Bao. My surname is Han and I am a vagrant cultivator of the Scattered Star Seas.”

“The Scattered Star Seas? There was previously a fellow Daoist that originated from the Scattered Star Seas, but unfortunately, he perished during a mission after encountering a fearsome umbra beast. Regardless, there are truly too few Fellow Daoists proficient in the Dao of talismans. From how deeply engrossed you were while looking at the stone talisman, you must hold quite some skill in the area!” The old man sighed and quickly changed the subject.

“Stone talisman? Are you talking about the disc?” Han Li wore a baffled expression. This was the first time he had heard of such a thing.

The long-haired old man narrowed his eyes as he proudly said, “Hehe! It’s no surprise that you wouldn’t know of such things, as I reckon that stone and jade talismans have all but vanished in the other lands. Only a few sects in our Five Dragon Seas are still able to refine these ancient talismans.”

When Han Li heard this, his baffled expression disappeared and replaced with a frown. He glanced at the old man and said, “I’ve truly never heard of stone or jade talismans ever being created in this world. I’ve spent quite some time studying the Dao of talismans, and the talisman characters on the stone disk leave me filled with amazement. Your explanation has dispelled some of my confusion, but is it mistaken on my part that I’ve perceived spell formation characteristics in these talismans?”

The old man revealed a trace of shock before rubbing his hands

together and wearing a wide smile, “I truly didn’t expect that Fellow Daoist was proficient in the both talismans and formation spells. You’ve earned my respect! Fellow Daoist Han isn’t mistaken, this purple cloud stone talisman is quite a bit different from true stone talismans. In order to utilize umbra energy, it was altered with a few spell formation characteristics, effectively turning it into both a talisman and a spell formation. But as a result of this modification, it’s power has also greatly decreased.

Han Li nodded his head with a pensive expression and took another glance at the stone disk. A trace of confusion flickered from Han Li’s eyes, “From what you’ve said, you are able to use umbra energy to perform magic techniques by using umbra beast gems and spell formations. However, I don’t see any beast gems embedded in the disc. Could there be something else that is peculiar about the stone talisman.”

“It seems there is still much that Fellow Daoist doesn’t know. Surely you’ve seen the Insidious Mauler from today. Although a majority of people in the village cultivate martial arts and have gained fleshly might beyond that of ordinary people, it isn’t possible for a lone person to challenge great umbra beasts with martial arts alone. Even if they were able to defeat one with superior numbers, there would be many casualties and would be an unsustainable tactic. As such, we’ve use umbra energy to disable the enemy with a few magic techniques during the village’s time of need. However, this also consumes the village’s stockpile of gems so it must first be considered whether or not the village would be able to persist without them.”

The old man smiled and paused for a moment before continuing, “Regardless, these beast gems are incredibly difficult to acquire. Generally, the larger the demon beast, the more likely there’s a beast gem inside their skull, but that isn’t a guarantee. There were several times where we invested great amounts of effort and resources to slay a huge demon beast, but no beast gems were

found on its corpse. As for the villagers that slayed a few of the Firescale Beasts on their way back, they were actually able to find a beast gem among them but this tends to be an exception.

“In summary, the demand for beast gems is astonishingly high due to the constant assaults by the umbra beasts. However, we’ve only managed to maintain a stockpile of about ten umbra beast gems over the years so we only use them with reluctance. As a result, the beast gems are kept among the village elders, and are only to be used when required. After the battle is concluded, they are immediately returned. As for the stone talismans, they are instilled with several days worth of power and the talisman is left to persist for several days. The beast gems aren’t allowed to be embedded in them, wasting the slots that were specifically refined for them.” The old man appeared somewhat dissatisfied with the village elders’ methods and rubbed a square groove at the side of the stone disc with a wry expression.

Han Li silently smiled in response. He reckoned the the old man had told him that last part in order to involve him in a power struggle within the village. However, Han Li didn’t have the slightest interest in becoming tangled up in the matter.

It appeared that the old man in front of him had started behaving like a mortal after he was severed from the path of cultivation, and had involved himself in a contest for political power. Han Li sighed and felt that this was quite lamentable.

A trace of disappointment appeared in the old man’s eyes when he saw Han Li remain silent. But soon, his expression recovered and he began to idly chat.

The old man casually mentioned, “It is unknown just how many years this forsaken land has existed. Although very few cultivators are sucked in, I reckon that over time several hundred cultivators have met their end here in the Umbra Realm. I’ve heard that Core Formation cultivators and even Nascent Soul cultivators have lived out their days in this land.”

Han Li's expression stirred, "There have been Nascent Soul cultivators here?"

The old man sighed, "That's right. Although I don't know how many years ago it was when that expert had been sucked into this land, but he had once been an elder of this village. I guess that he was the same as you two, and was sucked into the ghost mist when there was an eruption of Spirit Extinguishing Qi. Normally, the strange fog would be incapable of capturing such a figure."

"That should be the case. However, the Spirit Extinguishing Qi is quite fearsome. I'd guess that only the Deity Transformation stage cultivators from legend would be able to resist it."

"Deity transformation stage! Hehe, Fellow Daoist's scope of thought is truly wide. With regards to the Nascent Soul cultivator, although he already died trapped in this place, he left behind a few records, some of which detail his cultivation experiences. While these items might be incredibly precious on the outside, but here? Heh..." The old man shook his head with a sense of regret.

Han Li animatedly said, "His cultivation experiences! I am very interested. Would Fellow Daoist happen to know where they are?"

Records of a Nascent Soul cultivator's experiences are extremely valuable. It was only natural for Han Li to want to take a look.

The old man rubbed the wrinkles on his face and casually said, "Hehe! I was excited like you when I first heard of this. However, after staying in this place for so long, I've completely lose interest in them. Without any magic power, the records are nothing more than drawings. If you're still interested in taking a look, all of the cultivators' remaining possessions are being kept in storage." The old man then pointed to a shabby stone building in a corner of the village.

Barely restraining his excitement, Han Li calmly said a few words of thanks to the old man.

Han Li chatted a bit more with the old man, but he was able to see Han Li's impatience and took the initiative to take his leave.

Han Li watched the old man's departing figure and pursed his lips. After a quick moment of deliberation, he shook his head and descended from the stone platform. He then quickly walked towards the storage room with the cultivators' remaining belongings.

Chapter 585: Reappearance of Demon Script

Many villagers along the way felt that Han Li's face was somewhat unfamiliar and curiously glanced at him. However, none of them bothered to approach or question him.

As a result, Han Li was able to arrive in front of a rather worn black stone building unobstructed. After a moment of hesitation, he pushed the door in front of him, but it didn't budge in the slightest.

Han Li was surprised by the door's resistance and suspected that there was something wrong with the door. But after taking another deep breath, he used the entirety of his strength. Although he hadn't cultivated any exterior martial arts, his body had passed through the essence cleansing of both Foundation Establishment and Core Formation and was able to muster great force.

With a heavy groan, the door slowly began to give way, inch by inch, and Han Li was elated at the sight.

At that moment, he discovered that for some reason, the door was twice as thick as an ordinary door. It was no wonder the door was nearly stuck.

Han Li quickly entered the room and was faced with a moist stench of decay. He grimaced and quickly held his breath until the outside air rushed into the room and cleared out most of the unpleasant scent. He then took a short breath of fresh air before he began to look through the room, using the faint light from the doorway.

The room was rather simple. Apart from the rows of stone tablets that took up a majority of the room, there were also a few stone tables. The stone tablets were about three meters tall and six meters wide, much to Han Li's surprise. As for the stone tables, they had records and a few scrolls as well as what seemed to be lifeless magic tools.

Han Li quickly recovered from his surprise, and after some thought, he burst into laughter.

How could one find wood or bamboo to make paper with in this realm? As for jade slips, they were incapable of being used without magic power. As such, the stone tablets would be the only way to record something so these stone tablets should be the records they had left behind.

As for the magic tools on the table, they seemed to be just like his own flying swords and must be removed from this place before they could be put away. As for storage pouches, Han Li hadn't spotted any of them in the room. It seems they had been dealt with in a different manner and weren't left on display.

After glancing at the general situation in the room, Han Li casually walked over to a stone tablet and saw that it was covered in a thick layer of dust, obscuring whatever was carved into it. Han Li casually tore off a piece of his jacket with a frown and started to wipe it clean.

Soon, Han Li was able to see what was carved onto the tablet.

These weren't characters that were widely used in the cultivation world but rather were a type of rarely seen script. Fortunately for Han Li, he was vastly experienced and could easily recognize them.

But as soon as Han Li glanced at the tablet, his interest immediately disappeared. This was merely the diary of a Foundation Establishment cultivator. Han Li immediately set it to the side and began to look through the other stone tablets in the room.

There were about twenty in total. It was only when Han Li reached the sixth stone tablet that his interest finally began to stir. He had found what he was looking for, the cultivation experiences of the Nascent Soul cultivator! Han Li was entranced and motionlessly stood in front of the stone tablet for an unknown amount of time before letting out a long breath and revealing a

complicated expression.

Han Li muttered, “So it turns out that condensing a Nascent Soul is such a fearsome affair. Even with the assistance of the Ninecurl Spirit Ginseng, my odds of condensing a Nascent Soul still aren’t very high. It seems that being dropped into the Umbra Realm was somewhat beneficial after all.”

Although the tablet didn’t describe any specific method of cultivation, the nameless Nascent Soul cultivator had recorded his experiences from the Foundation Establishment stage to when he had condensed a Nascent Soul with impeccable detail. Han Li felt delighted surprise upon reading through them. With the pointers given through the Nascent Soul cultivator’s experiences, Han Li would make far less mistakes due to misconceptions when condensing a Nascent Soul.

After reading through the stone tablet several times to make sure that he hadn’t overlooked anything, Han Li put it to the side and began to look through the remaining tablets.

He had originally intended to depart, but after some thought, he figured that since he was already there he may as well read through them all and learn what he could. As such, Han Li looked through each of the tablets in a lax manner.

As expected, the remaining tablets didn’t contain anything truly useful. Although a few of them contained cultivation arts, they were all beneath his notice as he had the Profound Yin Arts in his possession.

After the time it took to finish a meal, Han Li arrived at the final tablet.

He absent-mindedly swept the dust off of the tablet and examined it before revealing an astonished expression.

This tablet was completely different from the rest. It was filled with finely carved, rice-sized characters that were far smaller than

anything on the previous tablets. Furthermore, when Han Li swept his gaze over them, he discovered that there were two different types of characters written on the tablet. One was a common ancient language, but the other was in demon beast script.

Han Li's curiosity was greatly piqued, and he began to carefully look through it while becoming increasingly more excited.

The stone tablet was a manual specifically intended to teach the demon language. Furthermore, it was extremely detailed and gave word by word explanations. The cultivator who carved this had an immense familiarity with the demon beast language.

Although Han Li couldn't immediately grasp the teachings, if he recorded the text and slowly read through it day by day, he was certain to be able to learn it. As such, he would be able to clearly understand the demon techniques that were recorded in the old hide book and the copper demon plate.

As for whether or not humans could learn the techniques of demons, Han Li didn't bother thinking much about it. Even if the demon techniques were of no use to him, there were only benefits to be gained from learning the demon language. Who knew whether or not it would be useful in the future?

After all, this was an incredibly rare opportunity.

After spending a rather long period of time, Han Li managed to utilize his eidetic memory and commit every character on the tablet to memory without fail. He then took a deep breath and left the room without even bothering to take another look at the magic tools on the tables.

After leaving the stone building, Han Li began to wander around the village and examined a few of the more peculiar buildings. He would examine them closely and talk to a few of the nearby villagers about them. Fortunately for him, these villagers were rather simple-minded. Although he as a complete stranger, they amiably answered any questions he had.

With this, Han Li quickly began to understand a few basic things about the Umbra Realm.

For example, since there were no iron mines or such, they could only refine weapons from the bones of particular umbra beasts. Of course, weapons couldn't directly be made from the bones themselves and were immersed in a liquid known as "dark water", hardening the weapons as a result. Additionally, they gained the added effect of Yin flames, causing them to become particularly powerful against umbra beasts. But because the supplementary effect of the Yin flames quickly expired, these weapons had to be re-immersed in dark water every so often in order to maintain their deadliness. This greatly aroused Han Li's curiosity.

Furthermore, every few months, there would be a storm of Yin winds that lasted several days. During this time, a majority of the umbra realm would be covered in bone-chilling black Yin winds. Humans are incapable of moving outside during this period, as they would be turned into black ice sculptures by the Yin winds. Only with the protection of the village's spell techniques could the villagers remain unharmed.

In contrast, umbra beasts were most active during the storm and would frequently appear, sometimes attacking the villages in groups, much to the worry of humans.

Han Li had acquired quite a lot of information in this manner before suddenly being inspired to ask about the slender-eyed white-faced man that seemed to bode him ill. They told him that he was an outsider surnamed Feng who had been sucked in several years ago that possessed astonishing martial arts. He had killed powerful umbra beasts many times since arriving and was rather renowned in the village. As a result, he had become an elder despite his young age and was responsible for teaching the youths in the village martial arts, gaining great prestige amongst the village youth as well.

While Han Li didn't feel particularly fearful after hearing this, he

inwardly frowned and felt that the man would prove quite troublesome.

After strolling around the village for a while longer and seeing what there was to see, he leisurely made his way back to his building.

But just as he arrived, Han Li suddenly heard a man's voice coming from within the room.

“What? Everything I just said was sincere. So long as Lady Mei marries me, not only will you have no lack of food, but you need not risk your life to carry out missions. I have remained alone for many years, not because I am a fickle person, but because Lady Mei is the first that truly touches my heart.” At some unknown time, the middle-aged man surnamed Feng had arrived within the room.

Chapter 586: An Eye For An Eye

When Han Li heard what was being said he was stunned, but he soon found himself unsure whether he should laugh or cry.

He eventually realized that the speaker was the middle-aged man surnamed Feng. Han Li finally knew the reason he was so hostile towards him. The man mistakenly believed that Han Li and Mei Ning had some sort of intimate relationship because they had arrived together.

However, it was no surprise to Han Li that this Elder Feng would feel his heart stir upon seeing Mei Ning. The women in the village that he had seen weren't beautiful in the least.

While Mei Ning wasn't on par with country-shattering beauties such as Yuan Yao or Fairy Violet Spirit, she was still exceptionally gorgeous by all accounts. With the addition of her many years of cultivation, she possessed an alluring aura that mortals couldn't possibly match.

"I can pretend that I didn't hear that. I am a cultivator, I can't marry a mortal. Please leave." To Han Li's surprise, Mei Ning was unwavering even while alone and spoke with a blunt coldness.

The middle-aged man grew enraged at Mei Ning's refusal and his tone grew sinister, "Humph! It seems Lady Mei still doesn't realize the situation she is in. This is the Umbra Realm, and your status as a cultivator has no value here. Perhaps commoners might hold some reverence towards you, but in my eyes, without any umbra beast gems you are merely an ordinary mortal. Could it be that you truly believe your male companion would be able to fight me? My martial arts were unrivaled in the entire Four Crest Seas. If I wanted to kill him, who could stop me?"

It was beyond Mei Ning's imagination that a mortal would dare to threaten her and her voice began to tremble, "You dare to threaten me?"

“Of course I dare. Why wouldn’t I?”

“What do you intend...”

Not knowing what the man would do, Mei Ning suddenly yelled out in terror.

When Han Li heard this, he rubbed his nose and bitterly chuckled in his mind. Although it could be said that he had no prior relationship with the woman, she was still a fellow cultivator that was trapped in the Umbra Realm just like him. He wasn’t so heartless that he could ignore her current plight.

With that thought, Han Li wryly smiled. Bang! Before Mei Ning screamed a second time, he kicked open the door and confidently walked in.

Mei Ning was pushed into a corner of the room by the middleman surnamed Feng. When he heard the door burst open, his evil grin was replaced with a look of astonishment.

When he saw that Han Li was the one who entered, his expression quickly grew sullen.

When Mei Ning saw Han Li, her pale expression immediately brightened as she ran out of the corner to Han Li’s side.

The woman managed to regain her bearings and immediately warned, “Fellow Daoist Han, be careful. That man wishes to do you harm!”

Without turning his head away from the man surnamed Feng, he calmly said, “Relax! I heard what he said from outside the room.”

The middle-aged man coldly stared at Han Li and asked with a harsh tone, “When did you return? I didn’t hear any movements.” He was extremely confident in his inner strength. With it, he could hear the rustling of leaves and grass from over forty meters away. However, he was baffled by the fact that he hadn’t been able to detect Han Li.

Han Li lazily turned his head towards the man surnamed Feng and half-heartedly said, "It seems you are quite confident in your martial arts. However, it was quite stupid of you to target me."

When the middle-aged man heard this, a malicious look appeared in his eyes, "Stupid? It's been a while since anyone has called me that. I'll have to break one of your arms to discipline you." His body then blurred without another word and he shot towards Han Li. As his palm fiercely struck towards Han Li's right forearm, it grew somewhat larger and carried a powerful gale.

From his actions, it appeared that he truly wanted to break Han Li's forearm in two.

As Han Li watched his quick and violent strike, his figure blurred with a calm expression and he left behind four different afterimages as he met his strike.

The middle-aged man was greatly shocked and reflexively turned his palm halfway to strike the silhouette before him. However, that silhouette was only an illusion, and his palm only struck air.

"This is..." Before the middle-aged man realized what had happened, a small azure dagger had silently been pressed against his throat.

The man felt an ice-cold sensation tremble throughout his body and his hair stood on end.

The middle-aged man heard Han Li speak from behind him with an emotionless tone, "It's best that you don't flail about. Although I don't wish to leave the village due to murder, if you force my hand, I will reluctantly do so."

The middle-aged man immediately froze as the dagger at his throat was incredibly sharp. He didn't believe in the slightest that Han Li would hesitate to slice open his throat, and it would take but the slight movement. However, the fear on his face was accompanied by complete disbelief. He hadn't been able to

perceive Han Li going behind him in the slightest.

“Since your esteemed self planned to break my arm, it is only proper that I return the favor in kind.” Without waiting for a response, Han Li swiftly grabbed onto his forearm at an odd angle and suddenly squeezed.

Crack. The middle-aged man’s forearm bones were cleanly snapped with an inconceivable burst of strength.

“Agh!” Although the middle-aged man was extremely hardy, he still felt an immense pain from his arm and groaned in pain. However, he wasn’t an ordinary man and managed to forcibly stifle his yelp despite the cold sweat covering his face.

Han Li resisted the impulse to finish him off and his body blurred away. With a calm expression, he warned, “Remember that if you dare to enter this building again, it won’t end with your arm. I’ll be taking your life as well.”

Han Li was able to suppress the man by utilizing the miraculous effects of the Shifting Smoke Steps, but he didn’t really intend on killing him as there would surely be someone who had seen the middle-aged man enter this building. He didn’t wish to suddenly be a target of pursuit immediately after coming to this unfamiliar land.

By breaking the middle-aged man’s arm, he had given himself half a month’s breathing room before he would recover his strength. This would give Han Li enough time to plan out what he would do in the future.

He knew that such a minor punishment was only a temporary measure, and that if he let him go, he would surely come back for trouble, given his forceful temperament. If a suitable opportunity arose in the future, Han Li wouldn’t mind secretly killing him.

“I’ve truly made an error in judgement . I didn’t expect that your esteemed self was a top rank martial arts expert. I admit defeat.”

With an ashen expression, the middle-aged man uttered this before quickly leaving the building. His departing figure made for a rather sorry sight.

When Mei Ning saw the middle-aged man depart from the building she let out a breath of relief. She then saluted Han Li with a slight blush and said, “Many thanks for Brother Han’s assistance!”

Han Li casually fiddled with one of his flying swords before casually placing it back inside his robes. He nonchalantly said, “It was nothing. If you truly hold no interest in this person, then you should do your best to avoid him. However, if Lady Mei intends to remain in this village, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to become his bride.”

Mei Ning shook her head and bluntly said, “Marry him!? Absolutely not. Ever since I set foot on the path of immortal cultivation, I made a pledge that I would only be wed to a high grade cultivator. How could I possibly agree to marry a mortal without any spiritual roots?”

Han Li’s expression remained unchanged upon hearing the woman. He silently walked over to a chair and calmly sat down before closing his eyes.

While the woman was unable to achieve the same level of calm as Han Li after what she had just experienced, she went to the stone bed and also sat down. Not long after, her expression fluctuated as she expectantly asked, “Fellow Daoist Han, do you have any good plans to escape this place?”

After a moment of silence, he opened his eyes and insipidly said, “Did Lady Mei not listen to the method to depart this place? How could I possibly have a good idea for that already?”

When Mei Ning heard his response, she clearly didn’t believe him and her eyes quickly reddened, “Fellow Daoist Han, don’t deceive me. When I heard the elder’s method, I believed that it was

impossible. Although Fellow Daoist remained silent, you appeared calm and confident. You clearly must have some method of escaping this place. Could it be that Brother Han believes this little woman to be a hindrance and plans to move by himself?”

Chapter 587: Transient Spirit Qi

Han Li frowned for a moment before calmly saying, “Fellow Daoist Mei, since we arrived here together, it could be considered that there is some destiny between us. Since Lady Mei already mentioned it, I won’t conceal it any longer. I feel that I am somewhat able to climb Stormwind Mountain. Regardless of whether it’s the flying umbra beasts that circle the mountain or the hallucinogenic mist, I have methods of dealing with them. However, these methods will only work for me alone. I do not have the skill to bring along anyone else as I would only be able to take care of myself when danger approaches. Fellow Daoist Mei would be certain to die. Since you are so young, it would be better to stay here. Perhaps there will be another opportunity to leave in the future!”

The final sentence was supposed to comfort her, but when Han Li heard himself say it, he couldn’t help but feel that it sounded quite artificial. However, he had been speaking the truth.

Mei Ning’s face instantly paled and she bit her lips in silence.

When Han Li saw the woman turn silent, he sighed and closed his eyes once more.

To tell the truth, he didn’t have a bad impression of Mei Ning. Were she capable enough, he may have provided assistance. But as of right now, Han Li couldn’t afford to increase the burden to himself. He could only still his heart and leave the woman behind. Fortunately, even if she was left behind in the Umbra Realm, she wouldn’t have too difficult a life. At worst, her path of Immortal cultivation had come an end. He didn’t have anything to feel guilty about!

The room settled into silence. After an unknown amount of time passed, Han Li believed that the woman was crestfallen. When he was about to drift off to sleep, he suddenly heard her say, “If I can

temporarily restore a bit of your magic power, would you be able to bring me out?”

“What?” Han Li’s eyes shot open and he stared at the woman with disbelief. His sleepiness had completely disappeared.

Mei Ning had her hands wrapped around her knees as she sat on the bed. Her face turned to the side as if she hadn’t spoken.

Just as Han Li was doubting whether or not he had misheard, the woman stretched her body out and raised her head with determination clear in her eyes. “I have a method to temporarily restore a bit of magic power to Brother Han. Although it will last only a moment, it should be of great assistance when Han Li climbs the mountain. However, in addition to taking me away from this land, I have another condition for my assistance.”

After Mei Ning said this, her expression appeared strange, causing Han Li to feel slight doubt.

Han Li stared at the woman and spoke with a heavy tone, “It’s not that I don’t believe you, but even a Nascent Soul cultivator was trapped here, incapable of restoring his abilities. Is Fellow Daoist Mei joking?”

At that moment, his expression was filled with doubt, but it also contained a trace of hope. If he could temporarily restore his magic power, his odds of escaping would be almost certain. Even if it was only a small bit of magic power for a short amount of time, it would be more than enough.

His storage pouch had several threads that didn’t need spiritual power to activate. With their wondrous powers, his safety would be further guaranteed.

As for his spirit beast pouches, although the Gold Devouring Beetles and the Bloodjade Spider require spiritual sense to control, he would just barely be able to use the Weeping Soul Pearl within his body to control the Weeping Soul Beast. Although those Umbra

Beasts weren't malicious spirits, they were condensed from umbra Qi, something reminiscent of Yin Qi. They should at least be easily restrained, and wouldn't pose much of a threat to him.

With that thought, Han Li grew excited.

With a hesitant expression, Mei Ning whispered, "Although this little woman doesn't have mutated spiritual roots or heavenly spiritual roots, I possess the Transient Jade Phoenix Marrow constitution. Brother Han should know what this means. Through a secret technique, I will be able to give Brother Han my Transient Spirit Qi. The Transient Spirit Qi is extremely pure spiritual power, and will be able to ward off the Spirit Extinguishing Qi for a moment. Of course, the Transient Spiritual Qi will eventually scatter, and Fellow Daoist will once again be without any magic power."

"Transient Jade Phoenix Marrow constitution!" Han Li was stunned for a moment. But soon after, he started to examine the woman with a strange gaze as his face revealed a trace of understanding.

Mei Ning slowly said, "That's right. If Fellow Daoist doubts me, he may examine me to know that my words aren't false." At the same time, a slight blush arose from her face.

"The you must excuse me." After a moment of hesitation, Han Li stood up and walked over. With something so important, he had no choice but to make certain.

At that moment, Mei Ning forced herself to be calm as she rolled up her sleeve, revealing her arm. The arm actually had a spot of gecko cinnabar on it.

[TL: gecko cinnabar is supposed to tell whether or not someone is a virgin.]

As Han Li watched, the woman clenched her teeth and she lightly pressed her thumb onto the spot before quickly releasing it.

Han Li's heart stirred as he watched from the bedside. He saw the spot of gecko cinnabar gradually fade away to reveal a silver phoenix pattern. The flowing brilliance made it appear astonishingly lifelike.

Han Li muttered in delighted surprise, "So this is the Transient Jade Spirit Phoenix!"

"Fellow Daoist should now know that I spoke truthfully." Mei Ning glanced at Han Li to confirm that he had seen it and hastily rolled down her sleeve with a flushed expression.

Han Li nodded his head and silently returned to his seat as he started to think.

Although she cannot be compared to those with extraordinary spiritual roots, she still possessed a rare constitution that was rarely seen even once every hundred years. It's presence was to be celebrated in the cultivation world and everyone knew of its existence.

Although only female cultivators could possess this constitution and it didn't provide any assistance on the path of cultivation, they would be in great demand by many male cultivators. This was because once the woman entered late Foundation Establishment stage, her body would produce a strand of pure Transient Spirit Qi.

This Transient Spirit Qi was known to be one of the seven pure spiritual powers in the world. While it was of no use to a woman, it could easily cleanse a man's essence and allow their cultivation to greatly progress.

Of course, while this essence cleansing effect was of lesser value to higher grade cultivators, it was still comparable to ancient rare medicinal pills.

However, this Transient Spirit Qi was something that could only be passed to a man willingly. There was no way to forcefully extract it from her by using a secret technique. Furthermore, in

her entire lifetime, she would only be able to give the Transient Spirit Qi once. She won't be able to produce more of the spirit Qi for the rest of her life. Additionally, if she lost her maidenhood before the Transient Spirit Qi was transmitted, it would vanish.

Han Li had previously browsed through records that were related to this matter. After recalling them, Han Li felt that if he acquired this spirit Qi, it could be possible that he'd be able to use a bit of magic power. After all, Transient Spirit Qi was one of the seven pure spirit Qi's in the world. At the very least, it should allow him access to his storage and spirit beast pouches. With that thought, Han Li raised his head and swept his gaze to the beautiful woman, calmly asking, "Lady Mei, could you tell me your other condition?"

After some hesitation, Mei Ning resolutely said, "It's simple. I wish for Brother Han to find my elder brother and bring him out of the Umbra Realm."

After some consideration, Han Li shook his head and said, "I'm afraid that I will only be able to meet that condition halfway."

"Halfway?" Mei Ning wore a strange expression. It was clear she didn't understand what he meant by this.

"Yes. There is another reason why I can't remain in the Umbra Realm for too long. As such, I can only agree to do my utmost and spend three months searching for your brother. If I am not able to find him within that time, then I will have to set off immediately."

After some thought, and feeling that Han Li wouldn't budge on this matter, she nodded her head and agreed, "Three months! This place isn't that large. You should be able to find him in that time. Alright, I accept."

Han Li smiled at her frank acceptance. Mei Ning then stared at Han Li and slowly said, "Although I've only known you for a short while, I don't believe that I've misjudged you. As such, to prove to you that I intend to keep my word, I will give you the Transient Spirit Qi whenever you ask. If Brother Han wishes for it now, then

I will not hesitate to give it to you.”

Chapter 588: Sensual Kiss

Han Li was surprised that the woman had spoken so bluntly. However, his surprise only lasted for a moment before his expression quickly returned to normal. “The Umbra Realm is extremely dangerous, and surprises are almost certain to happen. It would be best that I immediately recover magic power so that I may take out a few treasures. Otherwise, we may be unprepared when danger comes knocking.”

When Mei Ning heard Han Li, she nodded without the slightest surprise, but she soon thought of something and a slight blush appeared on her face. She whispered, “If I still had magic power, I would be able to easily give you the Transient Spirit Qi with a mere touch of the hand. But under these circumstances, I am only able to transfer it to you through... through mouth to mouth contact.” When Mei Ning said ‘mouth to mouth contact’, she lowered her head and her voice grew nearly indiscernible.

Han Li was startled, but upon seeing her heart-wrenching bashfulness, his heartbeat quickened. In order to restore his magic power, he would have to kiss this beautiful woman. This was an alluring affair that Han Li wouldn’t even have thought of, arousing a strange sensation in his heart. The air in the room became obscurely warm.

Seeing Mei Ning silently lower her head, Han Li knew that she wouldn’t take the initiative despite having little experience in this regard. After all, they didn’t have a particularly intimate relationship.

With that thought, Han Li wordlessly stood up and arrived at the stone bed’s side with a blur, sitting closely at the woman’s side.

Mei Ning unconsciously pulled back, but Han Li’s arm was wrapped around her waist, holding her in place.

The woman’s heart began to heavily thump as she raised her

head. When she saw Han Li's mysterious smile, she bowed her head again with a blush. However, Han Li raised her head with his free hand and prevented her from turning away. Mei Ning felt her mind grew completely blank as her heart fluttered. Han Li took a deep breath and smelled her faint fragrance. Then when he saw the bashful charm that exuded from her eyes, his heart grew fervent and he could no longer restrain himself. He lowered his head and fiercely pressed his lips onto hers.

It was warm, fragrant, and even a little sweet, arousing a feeling of ecstasy. As this occurred, Mei Ning's eyes grew weak and despondent. But a short moment later, she regained her bearings and she weakly attempted to push Han Li away.

Although she had already made preparations for Han Li's advance, she became overwhelmed with shyness as she faced the real thing and became completely flustered. Although this woman had many suitors, she had never been intimate with any of them.

The kiss sent waves of ecstasy throughout Han Li, leaving him filled with desire.

When she pushed her hands against Han Li, he boorishly pressed against her soft body. Taking advantage of the fact they were on the bed, he greedily grasped her lips with his own as if they were ambrosia.

Given Mei Ning's inferior strength, she had lost hope of breaking free once she entered his embrace. Although she had weakly struggled for a moment, she had eventually given up all resistance and closed her eyes, taking in the dense masculine scent that surrounded her. Her cheeks were flushed red as her long eyelashes fluttered, and her mind grew confused and lost.

For a time, the woman had completely forgotten to bestow the Transient Spirit Qi.

However, due to Han Li's exceedingly staunch will, he was able to regain clarity from his crazed passion after a short moment.

Han Li parted lips with Mei Ning for the time being and brought his mouth to her fine small ears. He chuckled and said, “Lady Mei, although the feeling of a man and a woman being together is truly wonderful, don’t forget to bestow the Transient Spirit Qi to me.”

When she heard this, her body trembled and her face grew to an even deeper shade of scarlet.

Han Li’s boorish behavior from before had now disappeared. He gently pressed his lips against her small mouth and began to feel a cold sensation slowly enter his body from their lips.

Han Li didn’t dare to be negligent and hastily climbed off Mei Ning and sat down cross-legged to the side as he began to circulate the spiritual Qi throughout his body.

Soon after, Mei Ning sat upright on the bed and flusteredly straightened out her disheveled robes with a scarlet face. For a time, she was incapable to regaining her bearings. The woman hesitantly stole a quick peek at Han Li and saw that his eyes were closed, causing her to unconsciously sigh in relief.

She then stood up from the bed and walked over to the chair that Han Li originally sat in. A complicated expression appeared on her face as she began to stare at Han Li’s tranquil expression.

After an unknown amount of time, Han Li eventually opened his eyes and saw the worried expression in Mei Ning’s eyes. In that instant, she hastily turned her face away, not daring to meet his gaze.

Han Li smiled upon seeing that the woman was at a loss. However, his smile immediately disappeared as he slapped his storage pouch. Items began to continuously emerge with flashes of white light, appearing at Han Li’s side. Not longer after, a large pile had formed.

There were materials such as demon beast hides among these items. It was unknown what Han Li intended to use them for.

“You can use magic power!” Although Mei Ning held confidence in her Transient Spirit Qi, she had shouted in joy upon seeing that Han Li was truly able to use his storage pouch.

Han Li smiled and said, “I don’t possess enough magic power to even cast low grade magic techniques, but opening a storage pouch shouldn’t be a problem.” After making sure that he had everything he needed, he put away the ancient treasures such as the golden mirrors, the flower basket, and the silver bell into the storage pouch with a wave of his sleeve.

When Mei Ning saw this, she was overwhelmed for a moment. An odd expression appeared on her face when she glanced at the pile of items at Han Li’s side.

Feeling that something was amiss, she hesitantly asked, “Brother Han, I haven’t asked you this yet. Are you a Foundation Establishment cultivator?”

Han Li had no intention of concealing anything and openly replied, “Of course not. I am a Core Formation cultivator!”

“What!” Although Mei Ning had suspected this, she couldn’t but cry out in surprise.

Han Li chuckled and paid no further heed to the woman’s sudden change in expression. He slapped the spirit beast pouch at his side, summoning a small monkey in a flash of brilliance. Surprisingly, the Weeping Soul Beast was extremely excited once it appeared. It sniffed around Han Li several times before frequently hopping around him.

Han Li’s heart stirred at the sight.

Having yet to recognize this famed beast, Mei Ning merely glanced at the monkey with a curious expression.

“Lady Mei, stay here for a moment. I wish to take advantage of my remaining magic power and attend to a few matters,” Han Li calmly said.

“A few matters?” The woman blinked in slight confusion.

Without saying anything further, Han Li began to store various items amongst his robes and departed from the room without paying any heed to the items he left behind.

Upon leaving the room, Han Li glanced around. The sky appeared the same as always since there was differentiation of day or night, but regardless, there was far less movement in the village. It was likely that a majority of people had fallen asleep.

Han Li beckoned to the Weeping Soul Beast, and had it enter his sleeve with a quick scamper. He then smiled at Mei Ning before confidently walking off.

As for Mei Ning, she merely remained in the room with blank confusion on her face.

Han Li walked through the village with extremely nimble movements, avoiding the gaze of others. In an instant, he stopped in front of one of the larger buildings in the village. After taking a quick glance around, he pushed open the door without any hesitation and walked inside. Han Li's expression then revealed joy. As expected, this was one of the buildings that stored “dark water”.

Han Li took out several large capacity void containers that he early grabbed from his storage pouch and filled up about half of the building's reserves before leaving.

Then after turning a few corners, he spotted a rather unusually fashioned stone building. His expression stirred and he stopped in place. If hadn't guessed incorrectly, this should be the residence of the middle-aged man surnamed Feng.

At that moment, he felt his meager magic power begin to fade away.

Chapter 589: Guests

Han Li swept his gaze over his surroundings. Ensuring that no one was nearby, he slapped his spirit beast pouch and had a single black-tainted Gold Devouring Beetle silently fly out. Then with great difficulty, he managed to command it with a sliver of spiritual sense. The insect then shot toward the stone room with a buzz and slipped in through a small crack.

The building was extremely quiet.

Han Li inwardly sneered and walked back to his residence without looking behind him. By the time he had turned a corner, he heard a miserable wail from the middle-aged man's residence.

Han Li pursed his lips and expressionlessly continued on his way. However, the disturbance had already begun to attract the attention of the villagers.

Since the middle-aged man was all but guaranteed to come for revenge, it would be better to cleanly deal with him while Han Li still had use of his magic power and spiritual sense. Otherwise, the man would remain a worry on his mind.

The remaining magic power that had been produced by the Transient Spirit Qi had disappeared by the time he returned to his residence. Likewise, his spiritual sense was once again incapable of leaving his body. Han Li could only shake his head in helplessness as he hurried back.

After walking into the room, he found Mei Ning lying down on the bed. From the rhythm of her soft breaths, it seemed she had fallen asleep a while ago.

When Han Li saw her sleeping figure, he recalled the kiss from not long before and felt his heart roil. But after seeing the woman's figure coldly curled up on the bed, he hesitated for a moment before fetching a large piece of demon beast hide from the pile of

materials on the table and placing it on top of the woman.

She soon relaxed her expression, and she unconsciously rolled the beast hide around her, remaining soundly asleep.

Han Li couldn't help but chuckle at the sight.

This turn of events was of no surprise. Although she possessed a body that was far superior to ordinary mortals, she was still a member of the fairer sex and both her mind and body must've been exhausted from all that happened. As a result, she had unintentionally fallen asleep.

Han Li smiled and then turned his attention to the pile of materials on the desk with a strange expression appearing in his eyes.

Not long after, Mei Ning slowly roused from her slumber. Before her eyes were entirely open, she heard a calm voice speak, "If Fellow Daoist Mei is awake, then please get up. We will be busy with preparations over the next two days."

After she heard Han Li's words, her face reddened and she sat up. Naturally, the demon beast hide fell off as a result.

This surprised her and she glanced in the direction of Han Li's voice with a complicated expression.

Han Li was currently sitting in a chair and was handling a rather large piece of demon beast hide. After Mei Ning rose, he smiled at her.

"Would Fellow Daoist Mei happen to be skilled in needlework? I have a few high grade fire-attribute demon beast hides. If it is possible, it would be best to turn them into clothes so that we'd be able to better resist Yin winds."

Mei Ning's embarrassment waned after seeing that Han Li hadn't brought up the matter of yesterday's kiss. But for some unknown reason, she also felt a trace of indescribable disappointment. Still, her face slightly blushed as she replied, "I can give it a try, but I'll

be requiring a needle and thread.”

Han Li grabbed a faint blue needle on the table and handed it over to her. “This demon beast hide is rather tough. Only flying needle magic tools are able to pierce through them. You’ll also be using the beast’s tendons to sew the hide together. In the end, we will only use this to withstand the Yin winds so there is no point in caring about appearance.”

The needle was a top grade magic treasure that was extremely sharp. Han Li had acquired it from some unfortunate cultivator that he had already forgotten about. He felt that it would prove quite useful as of present and took it out of his storage pouch.

Mei Ning bit on her lips and softly whispered, “I will do my best.”

Han Li nodded and thought to say something else when he heard footsteps from outside. An old man’s voice soon followed, “Is Fellow Daoist present?”

“Who is it?” Han Li asked, confused. He felt that the voice was rather familiar, and soon recalled that it belonged to the long haired old man.

“Hehe, Fellow Daoist and I had quite an enjoyable chat yesterday on top of the stone platform!”

Since it was the cultivator from the day before, Han Li found it awkward to keep the door shut. And since he was also curious about why they had suddenly paid him a visit, he walked towards the door and opened it, revealing the chuckling long-haired old man and two other old men behind him. One was red-faced and white-haired while the other had a hunchback and an eerie aura.

“Please, come in!” Han Li confidently invited the three in without asking them of their intentions.

“So this is Fellow Daoist Mei!” When the three saw Mei Ning, they revealed a slight trace of astonishment before calmly saluting her.

Mei Ning returned the greeting and moved to stand by Han Li's side. She remained silent as if she were deferring the matter to Han Li.

The three pensively glanced at one another. After they took a seat, Han Li glanced at the other two and slowly asked, "Are these two also...?"

"Fellow Daoist guessed correctly. These two are fellow cultivators who arrived from the Great State of Jin. This is Fellow Daoist Yun from the Heavenly Talisman Sect, and this is Fellow Daoist Jin from the Four Seas Institute."

Han Li nodded his head to each of them. The two then examined Han Li before politely smiling at him.

Han Li calmly asked, "May I ask what brings you three here?"

The three old men unconsciously glanced at each other. After a short moment, the long haired old man dryly coughed and spoke with a deep tone, "Fellow Daoist Han might not know this, but Elder Feng, the village's instructor for martial arts, suddenly died after being devoured alive by a nameless, exotic insect. It is said that the exotic insect bit his neck in his sleep, and he died a miserable death as a result."

With a completely unchanged expression, Han Li indifferently said, "Oh, so it was like that? What kind of exotic insect could possibly be so fearsome?" The three then began to mutter among themselves, as they were unable to tell whether or not Han Li was related to the event.

The long-haired old man stared at Han Li as he slowly said, "This isn't entirely clear. By the time he screamed, he was already on the verge of death. When the other villagers saw a flying insect fly from his wound, they immediately struck it with their weapons, but as the insect was incredibly hard, they weren't able to wound it in the least. As the insect was covered in blood, it was difficult to make out the exact details of its appearance." The other two

solemnly stared at Han Li in silence.

With an unchanged expression, Han Li leaned back in his chair and lazily said, “What? Could it be you three believe that I killed him? Are you three here to punish me?”

The old man’s expression slightly changed as he chuckled, “How could that be possible! We absolutely don’t believe that Fellow Daoist Han could’ve done such a thing. Even if he did it, we would be incredibly happy. That mortal named Feng had always viewed us with disdain just because of his martial arts. It is better that he is dead.”

Han Li narrowed his eyes and stared at the three in silence.

The long-haired old man’s eyes shifted and he probingly said, “However, I heard that Elder Feng paid a visit to Fellow Daoist’s room yesterday. Soon after, he left in a crestfallen manner. Additionally, they found that his arm was broken at the time of death. It seems even without any magic power, Fellow Daoist Han still possess some powerful techniques!”

Upon hearing their words, Han Li raised his eyebrows. It seemed these three held some influence in the village. They were actually able to find out that the man surnamed Feng had entered his room yesterday and that he was driven off.

After a moment of silence, Han Li’s voice grew cold. “Could you three Fellow Daoists be here for that matter? If that’s the case, please be direct. I have no interest in beating around the bush.”

“This...” The old men couldn’t help but glance at each other with hesitant expressions upon seeing Han Li be so direct.

Unwilling to speak in circles, Han Li’s expression grew impatient. “Since you are unwilling to speak, then I won’t force you. How about you come back some other time?”

Spurred by Han Li’s words, the hunchbacked old man said, “Fellow Daoist Han, would you be interested in governing the

village with us?”

“What do you mean?” Han Li frowned, already guessing what he truly meant.

Seeing that his companion had already struck the main point of the matter, the long haired old man revealed everything, “Since we are fellow cultivators, I will speak bluntly. Surely Fellow Daoist saw that apart from the head elder, all of the others are mortals. They hold greater power in the village because they were here before us. Cultivators are held to the same standard as mortals, and eat and starve as they do. The mortals even have us risk our lives to hunt umbra beasts. Contrarily, we are the only ones that are capable of using spells with the umbra beast gems, yet they all hold the gems in their hands. It is utterly humiliating to be treated as criminals without cause. Since this is the case, us cultivators have joined hands to grasp authority in the village. Would Fellow Daoist Han care to join us?”

Chapter 590: Bone Case

After hearing their offer to take control of the village, Han Li indifferently asked, “So you wish to seize power?”

The red-faced old man spoke with a strange emotion flickering within his eyes, “That’s right, how can cultivators like us serve at the beck and call of those so-called elders? We should be the elders of the village, not those mortals. I am a grand Foundation Establishment cultivator. It is unbearable to have been controlled by mortals for this long. Because we had too few cultivators, we didn’t dare to take action, but with the addition of you two, success will be very likely.”

Han Li swept his gaze over the three and expressionlessly said, “I’m not interested. Please return. I’ll pretend that this discussion never took place.”

Han Li’s response had greatly shocked them. The long-haired old man then forced a smile and further attempted to persuade him, “Does Fellow Daoist truly wish to become an inhabitant of this village? So long as we seize the positions of elders in the village, the power will be divided amongst us few. As a result, even if the conditions are poor, we can act freely.”

Han Li stroked his chin and serenely said, “I think that you Fellow Daoists are misunderstanding something. The two of us never said we intended on staying in this village. We will be leaving in two days. As such, your words are based on nothing more than a fantasy. Lady Mei and I will have nothing to do with the matter.”

After a moment of shock, the long-haired old man couldn’t help but say, “Leaving? Are you two searching for another village since you are unsatisfied with this one? You two might not know this, but our village is the among the best villages in the area. The other villages’ conditions are far worse than ours.”

Han Li smiled and lightly shook his head in silence.

The hunchbacked old man wore a look of astonishment when he came to a realization. “Could it be that you two intend on climbing Stormwind Mountain?”

Han Li smiled and said, “What’s wrong? Since we are unwilling to remain here, is there anything strange about wanting to leave?”

With an odd expression on his face, the red-faced old man twirled his beard and said, “This isn’t something that is merely strange. Don’t you two realize that Stormwind Mountain is extremely dangerous?”

Han Li looked at him and flatly said, “Although I don’t know much about it, I’ve gained an approximate understanding from the chief elder.”

The hunchbacked old man’s face contorted several times before he fearlessly said, “Humph! What does he know of the Stormwind Mountain’s fearsomeness? He probably only knows from hearsay, but Fellow Daoist Yun and I have personally experienced the true terror of Stormwind Mountain. It isn’t something that cultivators can face without magic power. The tremendously powerful umbra beasts that surround the mountain are an instant death sentence if you alarm them. Even if you manage to luckily slip past them, the violent Yin winds and the illusory mist are incredibly deadly. There wouldn’t be the slightest chance of climbing to the top of the mountain. Furthermore, being able to leave the Umbra Realm during an appearance of a crevice in space is only a rumor as no one has truly tested it. Perhaps it isn’t even possible to begin with.”

Han Li’s expression stirred and he asked with great interest, “You two Fellow Daoists have already climbed Stormwind Mountain? Could you tell us about it?”

The red-faced cultivator revealed trepidation as he slowly said, “Of course, Fellow Daoist Han. We also wish to talk of it in the

hopes that Fellow Daoist will abandon his hope of succeeding by a fluke. Originally, Fellow Daoist Jin and I were unwilling to spend the rest of our lives here when we had just arrived at the Umbra Realm. After spending a year in preparation, we set off to Stormwind Mountain together along with three other Fellow Daoists. Before we even arrived at the peak, one of our members was discovered by an umbra beast and was devoured. The rest of us painstakingly pushed forward, but two of our ranks were frozen from the Yin winds a quarter way up the mountain. As Fellow Daoist Jin and I carried a few ember stones on our body, we were able to persevere.

“But as we climbed higher, the Yin winds became increasingly more powerful and we were incapable of keeping steady footing. In the end, we only made it halfway up the mountain before were blown off a cliff by the gales; we hadn’t even reached the illusory mists. Surviving by sheer luck, we lost all will to continue onward and could only return helplessly. And after we managed to return to the village, we were bedridden for several months due to having the Yin winds penetrate deeply into our bones. Once we eventually recovered, we completely abandoned any thoughts of climbing Stormwind Mountain.”

Han Li rubbed his chin and pensively muttered, “That is quite fearsome!”

The old man spoke in a sincere tone, “It was far more fearsome than could be described. Please, perish the thought and abandon the attempt. Although it may seem possible, the mountain will take your life. Besides, you are still young. Once we reach our end, all the authority in the village will fall into your hands.”

“Fellow Daoists, please don’t try to change my mind. I will only abandon my hopes after personally failing in the attempt. Naturally, if I am truly incapable of reaching Stormwind Mountain’s peak, then I will give deep consideration towards your proposal.”

The three were somewhat displeased at his response and further attempted to persuade him. However, Han Li remained completely determined.

Helpless, the three turn their gazes to Mei Ning, but she only said, "I will follow Brother Han's decision regardless." Their gazes turned blank at her response.

Fortunately, Han Li hadn't refused them. If he managed to survive his attempt to climb the mountain, they would have another opportunity to recruit him. Since they were unable to persuade them, they could only force a smile before taking their leave.

After they reached a distance away, the hunchbacked old man solemnly asked, "Do you think they will betray us?"

The long-haired old man shook his head. "Betray us? What do they have to gain from betraying us? Surely you saw that the youngster surnamed Han is an intelligent person. He wouldn't do something so foolish, and the woman is following his lead as well. We can only hope that the two will realize the truth once they draw close to Stormwind Mountain and will turn back. After all, our revolt only has a fifty-fifty chance of success. With the other two, our strength would be considerably increased. Fortunately, Youngster Han unwittingly eliminated the greatest obstacle, Feng Tianji. His martial arts would've posed a difficult problem otherwise."

The red-faced old man nodded his head, "That's right. This person is truly cautious and wouldn't do something so strenuous and unrewarding. But just in case, we should send people to monitor them to avoid any potential mishaps."

"Brother Yin is quite thorough. Please have it done. However, we must be careful and avoid having him discover them. Regardless..." A doubtful expression appeared on the long-haired old man's face.

The hunchbacked old man was confused and asked, “Regardless?”

The long-haired old man muttered, “It might be an error on my part, but I felt that Youngster Han seemed completely confident that he could depart from the Umbra Realm. He was completely unphased when we mentioned the dangers of Stormwind Mountain. Could it be that he truly has a way to climb to the peak of Stormwind Mountain?”

The hunchbacked old man shook his head and dubiously said, “How is that possible? The Yin winds are unsurmountable. Brother Yun, I, and the countless frozen corpses around the mountain can attest to this. It is only a vain thought to believe one could actually escape this place.”

“Yes, it must’ve been a trick of the eyes!” After some thought, the long-haired old man concluded that it was truly impossible and smiled in self-mockery.

But when the red-faced old man heard this, his heart suddenly stirred and a thought came to mind.

When the three old men departed, Han Li spoke a few words to Mei Ning and left the room. He went over to the residence of the middle-aged man surnamed Feng and saw that he did truly die from having his throat torn open by the Gold Devouring Beetle.

After taking a look at his corpse from a distance, Han Li left and began to continue his inquiries with the villagers about the circumstances of the land, the whereabouts of other villages and the distribution of the umbra beasts. Eventually all of these small details were gathered together in his mind as information vital to escaping this land, and he was able to draw a detailed map from the villager’s descriptions.

In the following two days, Han Li finished most of his preparations and went to inform the village chief elder that they intended on climbing Stormwind Mountain.

The plump old man naturally felt that this was a pity and urged Han Li to stay, but after seeing Han Li's unwavering resolve, he didn't push the issue.

After Han Li returned to the residence, he and Mei Ning slept through the night. But in the early hours of morning on the next day, someone stealthily paid them a visit and knocked on their door.

When Han Li saw the red-faced old man, he was shocked. "Fellow Daoist Yun!"

"Fellow Daoist Han, I will keep matters short. Although I don't know whether or not you truly have the ability to leave this land, you could be considered my last hope. If you truly are capable of slipping past the disasters of Stormwind Mountain, I hope that you can deliver this box to my Heavenly Talisman Sect." With a serious expression, he took out a rough case made of bone and handed it over to Han Li with both hands.

Chapter 591: Spirit Subjugation Talisman

Han Li glanced at the case made of bone, but didn't move to receive it. With an indifferent expression, he asked, "What do you mean?" He wasn't about to take the case before realizing what it was.

The red-faced old man let out a long sigh and said, "There is no need for Fellow Daoist to think much of it. The case contains the refinement method for one of our sect protecting talismans, the Spirit Subjugation Talisman. Originally, only the sect master could learn it. I only have one intention; I wish for Fellow Daoist Han to deliver the talisman refinement method on my behalf. I don't wish for the talisman to forever be lost from the sect." Soon after, he lifted the cover of the case to reveal several pieces of engraved bone.

A trace of hesitation appeared on Han Li's face, "The Spirit Subjugation Talisman? Since only the sect master could learn, then your esteemed self must be the Heavenly Talisman Sect Master?"

The old man conceded, "I shamefully admit that I am the fifty-seventh sect master of the Heavenly Talisman Sect, a small dying sect from the State of Jin's Flower Cloud Province. It is quite laughable that a Foundation Establishment cultivator like myself acted in the position of sect master."

A strange expression momentarily appeared on Han Li's face but he soon frowned. After a short moment, he glanced at the old man and slowly said, "The Spirit Subjugation Talisman should certainly be unique considering that only the sect master could learn it. Fellow Daoist Yun doesn't fear that I would learn of its contents? Additionally, while I have heard of the resounding name of your country, I've never been there before, and I am unsure of whether or not an opportunity would truly arise for me to visit. From how I see it, aren't you being a bit too rash?"

When the red-faced old man heard Han Li's questions, he didn't reveal the slightest surprise. Instead, he replied with an appreciative expression, "Since I am giving this item to you, I've already accepted that Fellow Daoist Han will learn the talisman refinement technique as payment. To tell the truth, I'm not sure whether you would be interested in learning it after taking a look at it. Although the refinement method of the Spirit Subjugation talisman has been passed down from generation to generation, it had only been refined a scarce few times by the founders. It has merely continued to be passed down despite not being refined by the later sect masters. And since my own sect was already greatly weakened, this talisman will only serve as a sentimental dream of mine.

"As for whether or not Brother Han can arrive in the country of Jin, it doesn't really matter. I merely find peace of mind that the sect founder's creation isn't forever lost from the cultivation world. Even if the talisman refinement method truly isn't capable of returning to the sect, it will be good enough if Fellow Daoist Han passes it down so that it doesn't remain lost. When I later face the previous generations of sect masters in the underworld, I will have an excuse." The red-faced old man spoke with a bitter smile.

When Han Li heard this, he was somewhat dumbfounded.

The Heavenly Talisman's sect master was only seeking peace of mind. It seemed that the exchange was incredibly one sided in Han Li's favor and that he wouldn't suffer any loss. If he truly was incapable of going to the Great State of Jin, then he had no obligation to return the bone case. But if he was able to visit this famed country, then delivering the item would only take a minor effort.

Furthermore, it seemed that the Spirit Subjugation Talisman was a rather miraculous talisman for it to be so difficult to refine. It greatly piqued Han Li's interest! According to his vast experiences, apart from the commonly refined talismans of the

five elements, there were talismans with unfathomable and extraordinary effects known as secret talismans.

These secret talismans weren't difficult to differentiate among the five elements. Additionally, each sect had their own unique method of refining their own secret talisman, making it extremely difficult for outsiders to copy them.

For example, when the Star Palace Elders had nearly killed him in a sneak attack from Heavenvoid Hall, they had used a proxy produced by the Incarnation Talisman. Afterwards, they used a transportation talisman unique to the Star Palace to escape. Of course, the Incarnation talisman was worth far more than the teleportation talisman despite both being secret talismans.

After some further thought, Han Li accepted the bone case without any further hesitation and solemnly pledged, "I can only promise that I will try my best. Fellow Daoist Yun shouldn't expect too much."

"Hehe, that's fine! I am already completely grateful for Brother Han's words." The red-faced old man appreciatively thanked him several times. Afterwards, he had a quick chat with Han Li before tactfully taking his leave.

Han Li stood by the building's entrance as he watched the old man walk away before weighing the bone case in his hand. It was light; there didn't seem to be anything profound about the bone case itself.

Mei Ning, who had been silently standing behind him, couldn't help but ask, "This is the first time I've heard of this Spirit Subjugation Talisman. Could it truly be powerful?"

Han Li smiled at Mei Ning and said, "I don't know, but I reckon it is unordinary at the very least!" Soon after, he sat down beside the table in the room and started to look through each of the bones.

"Yi!" After a mere glance, Han Li yelped in shock.

“What? Is there a problem with the talisman refinement method?” Mei Ning sat down across from Han Li and glanced at him with bright curiosity. Ever since their kiss, they’d become somewhat more familiar with one another and their original awkwardness had disappeared.

“It’s nothing. It’s just that the materials required to refine the Spirit Subjugating Talisman are truly extraordinary. It was no wonder that the Heavenly Talisman Sect didn’t dare to refine this talisman.” After looking through all of the bones, he casually closed the bone case aside.

Mei Ning curiously asked, “What are these materials that Brother Han find so extraordinary?”

Han Li grabbed a bone shard and smiled, saying, “It’s primary materials can’t be considered much. But there is one extraordinary material that can’t be bought with spirit stones: the soul of a metamorphosis stage demon beast. Wouldn’t you say that is extraordinary?”

“The soul of a demon beast at metamorphosis stage?” Mei Ning gasped in astonishment.

However, Han Li’s mysterious expression as he grasped the bone shard had completely escaped her notice.

Having rested for the night, Han Li and Mei Ning left the village without notifying anybody else, much to the astonishment of the village guards.

...

Han Li found himself standing on yet another pile of rocks as he gazed into the yellow desert in front of him. After getting their bearings, Han Li and Mei Ning headed towards the nearest village.

Han Li’s plans were quite simple: find the elder brother of Mei Ning. If he was alive, he was certain to be found in another village, and when he was found, Han Li would bring him and Mei Ning to

Stormwind Mountain. Mei Ning felt that this plan was reasonable and followed his lead without complaint.

Then in the blink of an eye, the two faded away into the endless sand.

...

In an expanse of blood-crimson soil, there were a dozen young grey-robed men and women with bone pikes stealthily climbing up a tall mound and slowly surrounding it.

At the top of the mound, there were many green beasts with short and thick necks who were currently curled up in their sleep.

These were umbra beasts by the name of Jade Yin Toads. Their bodies were small and covered in lumps. While they appeared as if they were just enlarged toads from the mortal world, they didn't possess an ounce of poison on their bodies and were one of the few umbra beasts that were edible to humans.

These people had naturally come to hunt the Jade Yin Toads to ease the crisis of their village's food shortage.

The group's actions were nimble and silent. By the time they had completely surrounded them, a Jade Yin Toad suddenly opened its red eyes and saw that there were humans about a hundred meters away.

"Attack!" As soon as that was shouted, the beast began to croak in warning, but in the blink of an eye, over a dozen sparkling white bone pikes were shot towards the beasts.

As a result, a majority of the Jade Yin Toads had leapt away, and only two had met the barrage of spears. However, these two were the most vigorous of the toads and they managed to dodge out of the way, ending up with only scrapes from the spears.

The Jade Yin Toads were among the weakest of umbra beasts. Apart from being able to spout a few mouthfuls of Yin Qi, they had few other powerful attacks. However, they were particularly adept

at using their powerful jumps to escape with astonishing effectiveness.

The remaining two Jade Yin Toads took large breaths and spouted out large clouds of black Yin Qi. Afterwards, they jumped twenty five meters into the air and broke the encirclement. Although the group had continued to use their pikes without reserve, they were clearly too slow, and were incapable of catching up to the two Jade Yin Toads.

After the two Jade Yin Toads leapt towards a strange expanse of stone in the distance, a flash of azure light sparked, resulting in the two toads falling to the ground with their throats gouged.

Green blood painted the red ground.

This scene caused the dismayed youths to look on with astonishment.

Chapter 592: Absorbing Souls

With gusts of winds, two azure streaks flew out from the umbra beast corpses towards a nearby bolder. Afterwards, a man and a woman clothed in blue beast leather appeared on top of the boulder with a blur.

The man's appearance was ordinary in contrast to the woman's heart-swaying beauty, but a vast intelligence shined within his eyes. These two individuals were Han Li and Mei Ning. Han Li held two inch-long daggers in each of his hands. There was semi-transparent string wrapped around both of their hilts which appeared to be made from a slim beast tendon.

Han Li walked over and glanced down at the umbra beast carcasses before turning his gaze to the vigilant crowd. He smiled and amiably said, "I hope you won't take offense. I saw that two Jade Yin Toads were about to escape and I couldn't help but take action. But regardless, I have no desire towards these Jade Yin Toads; I merely wish to ask you a few questions."

One of the older party members doubtfully asked, "You truly do not want the beast carcasses?" It seemed he was the leader of the group of youths.

Han Li nudged a beast carcass with his foot and affirmatively replied, "Of course I don't. I already have plenty of food."

Although the man felt this was somewhat strange, he felt that there was nothing to lose and he eventually nodded his head, "Alright, go ahead and ask."

Han Li nodded, satisfied to see his tactful response, and calmly asked, "Are you natives to this land?"

The man frowned and replied, "That's right. We are villagers of Red Soil Village."

"That's good. We arrived here to make some inquiries. Have

there been any new arrivals that have joined your village? We are searching for someone.”

After a moment of thought, he hesitantly said, “New arrivals? None. However, after the appearance of the last spacial tear, we spotted several remains of both men and women in the umbra beast lair. By the time we spotted them, umbra beasts had already cleanly devoured them until nothing but bones were left.”

Standing behind Han Li, Mei Ning grimaced and said, “Bones?”

In the past month, the two had already visited three villages. Although there were a couple of cultivators that had narrowly survived the spacial tear, there was no sign of her brother.

Seeing that Han Li only wished to find someone, he relaxed and openly said, “That’s right. We’ve already buried their remains, but we have their possessions. They were placed in a village warehouse. Would you like to take a look?”

Han Li glanced at the silent Mei Ning before nodding, “That’d be good. We’ll have to trouble you.” If her brother’s possessions happened to be among them, then the search would be over. He had to confirm them just in case.

After calling out to those behind him to deal with the carasses of the toads, he cordially chatted with Han Li, “Hehe! From your tone, it seems you’re quite cultured. I could tell you’re an outsider. Have you just arrived in this land?”

Han Li beamingly smiled in response.

The two then followed the group for a couple of kilometers before arriving at an unfamiliar village.

This village was far smaller than the others. Although they also had stone walls surrounding them, they were only about twenty meters tall and appeared worn out as if it from long neglect.

From the size of the village, it seemed there were only about a hundred inhabitants at most.

After entering the village, their leader pointed at a relatively large stone room and apologetically told the two cultivators to head to the building by themselves. As the toad carcasses were vitally important, the villagers had to deal with them first.

Han Li didn't mind this and spoke a few words of thanks before heading there with Mei Ning.

Han Li glanced at the torn, bloody robes and asked with slight surprise, "These truly belonged to your brother?"

Han Li truly didn't expect that as soon as they entered that Mei Ning would immediately spot her brother's remnants. Her face had immediately grown pale at the sight and her eyes had become completely dispirited.

Mei Ning stared at the remnants with red eyes and muttered, "How could I possibly mistake these clothes? I personally made them for him. The storage pouch also has our sect's insignia."

Not knowing what to say to console her, Han Li could only hesitate for a moment before patting the woman's shoulders and quietly slipping away from the stone room. He knew that it would be better for her to be alone for the time being.

Just after he left, he began to hear faint sobs from the room. Han Li let out a sigh and then looked to the sky in silence.

A while later, Mei Ning left the room with swollen eyes. She calmly said, "Let's go. Since my brother has passed, there is no longer any need to visit the other villages. Let's head straight to Stormwind Mountain!" It seemed she had stifled the pain from the loss of her brother.

Han Li calmly replied, "Before we head off to Stormwind Mountain, there is still something I must do. I need to acquire a few umbra beast gems."

Mei Ning was stunned for a moment before asking in surprise, "Beast gems! What use is there in collecting them? They're quite

difficult to come by.”

“I have my own reasons for collecting them. I reckon that in the entire world, the umbra realm is the only place where one can find umbra beast gems. Even if one could find them elsewhere, they would likely be extremely scarce. Gathering umbra beast gems would’ve been incredibly difficult if we wished to acquire them when we had first arrived. However, we won’t be the ones handling the umbra beasts. It will be this one.” Han Li suddenly shook his sleeve and a green flash of light appeared before him.”

Mei Ming glanced at the small monkey that had suddenly appeared with suspicion, “This one?”

With a certain expression, Han Li said, “Of course!”

Because Han Li used the safer routes on his journey to find other villages, he was able to handle the low grade beasts by using only his flying swords. However, this didn’t result in him acquiring any umbra beast gems. Knowing that they had some relation to the puppets of Heavenvoid Hall, Han Li naturally wanted to collect a few.

At that moment, he called out to Mei Ning and had the Weeping Soul Beast return to his sleeve. He would spend the night at Red Soil Village before setting off and testing the efficacy of the Weeping Soul Beast on umbra beasts.

...

A twenty meter tall clawed beast leisurely walked out of a valley. Its huge claws were overpowering and its mouth was filled with vicious fangs. As the hegemon of the area, it had no fear of any high grade umbra beasts suddenly attacking it.

But at that moment, its dull ears suddenly heard something moving, and it turned its head with a malicious light glinting in its eyes. About a hundred meters away, a foot tall monkey had unknowingly appeared.

The small monkey was currently staring at the colossal beast with immense excitement.

When the huge beast caught sight of the small monkey, it merely snorted several times, wishing to scare it away. However, the monkey actually attacked, shooting out a yellow mist that enveloped it with fantastical speed.

After the mist of yellow light enveloped it, the colossal beast released a world-shaking roar, but the yellow mist quickly dimmed and shot back into the small monkey's large nose, carrying streaks of black Qi.

The small monkey chewed with great relish before patting its bulging belly. Its face appeared completely satisfied as if it just had a delicious meal.

At that moment, Han Li leisurely walked out with a relaxed expression. A flabbergasted Mei Ning followed after him.

The woman found this entire scene absurd. She had witnessed the enormous beast turning into a shriveled corpse in the blink of an eye. Another wave of disbelief suddenly crossed her mind when she faintly recalled the legend of a certain fearsome spirit beast.

As Mei Ning recovered from her shock, Han Li had already arrived in front of the beast's head. With a wave of his sleeve, a sparkling silver dagger appeared in his hand.

He expressionlessly chopped down, splitting the beast's skull like a watermelon. Soon after, a thumb-sized green gem fell out from the remains.

Han Li smiled at the sight of it and bent down to pick it up. Han Li then turned his head to the west and assuredly said, "There should be many more powerful umbra beasts about three kilometers west. Let's take care of them along the way."

Chapter 593: Stormwind Mountain

Stormwind Mountain was a huge mountain located in the northeast edge of the umbra realm. One could only see the bottom half of the mountain from the distance as the rest of it was densely covered in Yin clouds.

The mountain was made up of bare black stone and lacked any kind of vegetation. Additionally, it was over four kilometers high with storms of fierce Yin winds blowing around it. If common men were to climb it, they would only add to the many black ice sculptures already decorating the mountain.

The treacherous conditions of the mountain also caused its surroundings to become particularly gloomy. With endless thunder ringing from the skies and cold howling winds scattering stone and sand, it seemed as if the area was truly haunted.

Since places with dense umbra Qi were beloved by powerful umbra beasts, it was only natural for many fearsome demon beasts to occupy the nearby land. But today, there were some uninvited visitors paying a visit to Stormwind Mountain.

A beast carcass that was over a hundred meters tall fell onto the ground in a flash of silver light. The carcass then shriveled in an instant as the silver light flew away into the distance carrying an expanse of black Qi.

A moment later, a huge world-shaking roar filled the air.

Following a series of heavy thuds on the ground, a thirty-meter-tall silver ape appeared at the side of the umbra beast carcass. The huge ape's appearance was malevolent and vicious with each of its movements exuding an astonishing pressure. However, Han Li and Mei Ning were sitting on its back.

Han Li swept his gaze over the beast carcass and pushed off against the ape before deftly landing on the carcass's skull. In the

instant he landed, a cold glint flickered in his eyes and the carcass's skull split open, revealing nothing at all.

Han Li revealed a trace of disappointment, but his face soon turned back to normal.

As of current, he had accumulated over a hundred umbra beast gems. Although he knew there was a small chance that the groups of low grade umbra beasts could result in an umbra beast gem, he didn't have the time to hunt every single one of them down. He had to climb Stormwind Mountain before the next spacial tear appeared.

Mei Ning had also jumped down from the huge ape's shoulder. A second later, the huge ape flashed with silver light and shrank to a delicate foot tall form.

Han Li turned around to look at the Weeping Soul Beast's transformation and couldn't help but smile.

When he had left Red Soil Village, he had brought the Weeping Soul Beast to many various places to exterminate powerful umbra beasts. After absorbing large quantities of umbra beast soul essence, the weeping soul beast had suddenly gained the ability to transform into a huge ape, and not long after, its fur soon turned an eye-catching silver.

These changes had come as a great surprise to Han Li. According to the slip that Yuan Yao had given him, the Weeping Soul Beast shouldn't have the ability to enlarge itself, and its fur should've turned pitch-black upon advancing instead of silver.

It appeared that this peculiar evolution was a result of two aspects that had coincidentally met: umbra beast soul essence that greatly differed from the soul essence commonly found in the outside world, and the fact that the beast wasn't completely refined in the first place.

It wasn't as miraculous as the commonly known variant spirit

beasts, but its peculiar transformation was absolutely the first of its kind.

Although he didn't know whether or not this transformation resulted in strength greater than true Weeping Soul Beasts, Han Li was quite content after seeing these changes continue. After all, the refinement method of a true Weeping Soul Beast was a bloody affair. Although Han Li wasn't a soft person, he would've found it difficult to refine it according to the methods that he was given.

At that moment, the Weeping Soul Beast shot into Han Li's sleeve with a flash of white and silver light and deep breaths of sleep could be heard.

Han Li faintly smiled in response, but soon his face grew solemn when he gazed at Stormwind Mountain in the distance.

That previous umbra beast had been the last remaining giant umbra beast near Stormwind Mountain. They were now free to climb the mountain without obstruction.

Han Li took a deep glance at the distant mountain and slowly said, "Let's go! We have to climb to the top of the mountain before the next spacial tear appears. Otherwise, we'll be stuck here several more months."

Mei Ning agreed, "Of course! According to the native's method of predicting these intermittent spacial tears, the next tear should appear in about two weeks. If we were to miss it, we'd have to wait another half year."

Han Li faintly smiled and took the lead towards the huge mountain.

A quarter hour later, the two stood at the base of Stormwind Mountain.

Although they didn't feel anything from that distance, they were awed as they stood before the mountain. There were no neighboring mountains, only several kilometers of a single, steep

mountain.

Han Li didn't immediately start off on his climb. He first turned to Mei Ning and discussed the method that would be best to climb the gargantuan mountain. Not long after, the two became two black dots that slowly disappeared from sight as they gradually made their way up.

The first four kilometers weren't particularly difficult or strenuous for Han Li and Mei Ning, and they made their way up without much effort. But after that point, the bone-chilling Yin winds began to blow at faster speeds and with greater force.

At that point, Han Li and Mei Ning covered themselves in several articles of fire-attribute beast hide clothing, but even with this, their faces paled as the cold winds tore their skin. Were they ordinary mortals, they would've long since met their end by freezing over.

After persisting for another hundred meters through the Yin wind, Han Li stopped with a frown and solemnly pondered for a moment before taking out a fist-sized white gem from within his robes. The gem released a faint white luster that quickly enveloped the two.

The piercing Yin winds were greatly weakened upon touching the white light, and were no longer strong enough to do them harm. As a result, the two were able to arduously continue their ascent, relying on their beast hide clothes to resist the iciness of the air.

Eventually, the ground became covered in frost and their footing became slippery, forcing the two of them to slow their ascent and walk with caution. Additionally, their breathes became visible and it became increasingly more difficult for them to breath. Mei Ning in particular was gasping for air with a completely flushed face.

After an unknown amount of time passed as they continued on their trek, they found themselves before a precipitous expanse of

glistening black ice. If one wasn't careful as they climbed, they would find themselves falling off the mountain.

On their way, Han Li and Mei Ning had already put on rough scaled gloves out of necessity. Even with the gloves, the trek to that point had been incredibly difficult and the two would often lose their grip on the black frost.

Han Li raised his head to look at the top of the glistening cliff and sighed. He then turned his head to the pale-faced woman at his side and said, "Let's take a moment to rest beneath that cliff over there. We'll continue onward after we recover our strength."

Although she hadn't said anything, Han Li could tell at a glance that her strength was nearly exhausted. It would quite dangerous if she continued in this condition.

When Mei Ning heard this, she let out a long breath and nodded with a forced smile.

The huge cliff that Han Li spoke of was actually an inwardly slanted stone cliff. The appearance of such good shelter was quite timely, and the two hastily made their way towards it.

Fog and howling winds blew on the outside as Han Li and Mei Ning walked beneath the cliff. With a cautious expression, Han Li took out a thumb sized bead that he wore on his wrist and had it emit a faint azure light. Just as the fog approached them, the azure light forcibly repelled the fog. However, the fog still lingered nearby as if it were waiting for an opportunity to draw closer.

Mei Ning glanced at the fog and said, "It seems that if it weren't for Brother Han's Matron Screen Pearl, we would've been unable to make it past the Yin wind's strange fog!"

Han Li smiled and thought to say something when he suddenly froze and began to concentrate on his hearing.

When Mei Ning saw this, she was somewhat shocked and discreetly kept quiet.

Han Li indifferently said, “Be careful. Someone is approaching us from within the fog.” With a glint of azure light, an azure dagger appeared in his hand. He then stared into the fog in silence.

With complete confidence in Han Li’s words, Mei Ning immediately took a few steps back and stared outward with a nervous expression.

Chapter 594: Yin Yang Revolution Arts

Not long after, Mei Ning heard the sound of soft and heavy footsteps slowly drawing closer to them. She nervously glanced at Han Li, who seemed to notice her gaze and gently smiled in response.

Mei Ning unconsciously blushed and quickly focused her eyes away from Han Li, but she felt somewhat relieved as well.

As the footsteps grew clearer, Han Li could hear the faint gasps of two people, much to his surprise.

Han Li frowned and a trace of killing intent glinted within his eyes.

Suddenly, the thick fog parted and revealed a young man with his head held high. He had an elegant face and wore a jade band around his waist that faintly appeared to shine with white light.

However, when the man caught sight of Han Li, his face immediately distorted as he shouted in alarm, "It's you!?"

This man was the disciple of Archsaint Six Paths, Wen Tianren.

Han Li expressionlessly said, "That's right, it's me. You can now rest in peace!" With a flicker of azure light, Han Li tossed the dagger into the center of Wen Tianren's chest.

Peng! The dagger was easily knocked away as if it had struck metal. The torn clothes revealed a faint flicker of green light.

"Inner armor?"

Han Li was somewhat surprised that his strike was ineffective, but he snorted and waved his other hand, throwing another azure streak. This time, it was aimed at Wen Tianren's throat.

At that moment, Wen Tianren reacted and dodged in alarm, his body evading the dagger in a blur. Just as the dagger missed, he shot into the fog behind him. It appeared his body was quite

vigorous.

With yet another attack missing, Han Li merely glanced at Wen Tianren's fleeing figure. He remained still with a sneer on his face.

When Wen Tianren quickly turned his head around and saw Han Li's expression, he immediately felt that something was amiss and he turned around in a blur. But by then, it was already too late. He felt a piercing cold wind on the back of his neck followed by an icy sensation where the dagger struck him. The semi-transparent string of beast tendon that was tied around the dagger hilt was stretched taut.

A stream of blood then began to flow from Wen Tianren's corpse. His eyes remained wide open during his last moments as if he couldn't believe that he had died in this manner.

Han Li expressionlessly shook his right hand with his finger pulling on the taut tendon. The dagger then obediently flew out from Wen Tianren's neck and returned to his palm. At that moment, Han Li turned his gaze back into the dense fog and narrowed his eyes.

A slim figure then slowly appeared from the fog, revealing a gorgeous young woman dressed in white.

The woman smiled sweetly at Han Li and said, "Brother Han! I didn't think that we'd meet again."

"Lady Violet Spirit!" Han Li nodded with a calm expression and had his two daggers disappear into his sleeves with a shake of his hands.

Naturally, Han Li knew Fairy Violet Spirit's greatly changed appearance after hearing her conversation with Wen Tianren when he was trapped inside the golden flames. After seeing her true appearance, Han Li couldn't help but concede that Fairy Violet Spirit's grand reputation as one of the most beautiful women in the Scattered Star Seas was well deserved. Even Yuan

Yao's magnificent, breath-taking beauty was a smidgen less than Violet Spirit's.

But at that moment, Violet Spirit glanced down at the corpse on the ground and sighed, "I truly didn't think that the self proclaimed top Core Formation cultivator, Young Master Wen, would meet his end at Fellow Daoist Han's hand. If this were told to others, I suspect that most of them wouldn't believe it."

"Since I encountered him in this place, I naturally couldn't let him go," Han Li calmly replied. He then walked to the side of Wen Tianren's corpse and took his storage pouch without reservation. At that same moment, he took a glance at the jade cloud belt with curiosity.

Violet Spirit pursed her lips in a smile and explained, "That is the Four Celestials Belt. It is embedded with four miraculous gems that are capable of resisting wind, fire, water and earth. Additionally, it is capable of keeping one's mind calm. It truly is a rare treasure. He had relied much on this belt to journey in this land without obstruction."

"The Four Celestials Belt. It will prove quite useful at the moment." After some hesitation, he bent down and took the belt off of Wen Tianren's corpse.

He then searched through the corpse without reservation and found a dark green plate of inner armor along with several other treasures.

"Brother Han, who might this Fellow Daoist be?" Violet Spirit's bright gaze then turned to Mei Ning behind him.

Han Li calmly replied, "That is Lady Mei. She is a Fellow Daoist who was teleported alongside me."

"So it's Lady Mei!"

"I've had the pleasure of seeing you before!" Mei Ning felt somewhat awkward but she gazed at Violet Spirit with curiosity

regardless.

Fairy Violet Spirit was undoubtedly worthy of a grand reputation. Even Mei Ning remained mesmerized by her beauty for a while. She couldn't help but guess at the relationship between the two.

Fairy Violet Spirit kindly smiled at Mei Ning and revealed an apologetic expression to Han Li, "Fellow Daoist Han, please don't blame me for not assisting you that day. At the time..."

Han Li waved his hand and interrupted her with a casual tone, "There is no need for Lady Violet Spirit to speak of it! Although I don't know why you were together with Wen Tianren, I was able to see your unwillingness to be with him. Moreover, I clearly remember that you refused to act against my companion in the valley."

Fairy Violet Spirit inwardly sighed with relief upon seeing that Han Li wasn't angry with her and immediately smiled, saying, "Since Brother Han has already recognized my difficulties, then I will say no more. However, would it be possible for me to travel alongside you two?"

"Of course! You've already walked halfway into the fog and it would be difficult to turn back. Since we've already made it this far, there is no point in wasting the effort."

"Many thanks, Brother Han!" Fairy Violet Spirit's moist eyes began to shine, revealing an incomparable beauty.

Not long after, the three disappeared into the mist, leaving behind Wen Tianren's frozen corpse.

...

At the same moment, a strange scene was occurring inside a cave.

A gorgeous woman sat cross-legged on the ground across from a ghostly image surrounded in black Qi. The ghost was also sitting cross-legged. Although it appeared quite vague, it was reminiscent

of a young woman.

“Junior Martial Sister, have you truly decided to cultivate the Yin Yang Revolutions with me? It doesn’t seem to be a wise decision.” A somewhat unfamiliar woman’s voice urged against it.

“Senior Martial Sister Yan should know that because my original core was already shattered from using the Soulrise Technique, I had nearly cut off my path of cultivation. Furthermore, I didn’t expect that after paying such a heavy cost that the Soulrise Technique would be interrupted by the sudden appearance of the ghost mist. Because Senior Martial Sister’s soul has greatly condensed, she no longer has any hope of possessing a body. But fortunately, there is a silver lining. There is dense umbra Qi here is quite beneficial to those cultivating ghost Dao techniques. As for the Yin Yang Revolution Arts, it is a rarely seen human-ghost pair cultivation technique. By taking advantage of the umbra Qi, not only will Senior Martial Sister’s cultivation quickly increase, but I will also have a chance of returning to Core Formation stage. Even Nascent Soul stage wouldn’t be impossible.” Yuan Yao spoke with complete calmness.

“Since it’s like that, I won’t refuse any longer. However, I must warn Junior Martial Sister that although the technique will be incredibly effective by drawing support from the umbra Qi, you will suffer dire backlash and will also lose your right to reincarnation. You should consider it carefully. There is a reason why no one in the Azure Yang Sect used the cultivation art despite possessing it for so long.” The ghost woman seemed to have spoken the last two sentences with a trace of helplessness.

“Junior Martial Sister doesn’t need to say any further. I’ve already made my decision. There will be no regrets!” Yuan Yao wore an expression of grave resolution.

“Alright, since Junior Martial Sister doesn’t fear the consequences, then I won’t regard them either. Let us cultivate the Yin Yang Revolutions Art!” After a long sigh from the vague ghost,

it extended its two arms of black Qi.

When Yuan Yao saw this, she extended her hands without hesitation and closed her eyes upon contact, setting forth on the path of cultivation once more.

Chapter 595: Breaking Away

On a flat cliff on Stormwind Mountain stood a huge silver ape that was over forty meters tall. It was beating its chest while carrying Han Li, Mei Ning, and Violet Spirit on its back.

Han Li gravely stared at the sky in silence while the two women's faces were pale, faintly revealing a trace of panic.

There were over a thousand umbra beasts circling above them. There were beasts that were over twenty meters in length along with those that were only a foot long, all with wings that sprouted out from between their ribs. But regardless of size, they all looked fierce and malevolent without exception. However, these flying umbra beasts seemed to fear the overbearing pressure of the transformed Weeping Soul Beast and didn't dare to draw closer to them. They merely stayed in a deadlock by flying in circles above them.

Han Li felt somewhat uneasy. From the greed revealed inside the umbra beasts' eyes, it was unclear how long their patience would hold before they started to attack.

At the moment, Han Li was cursing the plump old man who had given him the information regarding the mountain. Although he did say that there were flying umbra beasts, he didn't say that they existed in such large quantities. It was unknown whether it had been deliberately concealed or if it truly wasn't known.

After passing through the area with the dense fog, they had originally believed that they could have a moment of respite. However, they didn't expect for these flying beasts to immediately surround them. Helpless, Han Li could only release the Weeping Soul Beast and have it transform.

Han Li was completely confident in the Weeping Soul Beast's abilities at restraining umbra beasts, but there were truly too many in the sky. Han Li was unsure if the Weeping Soul Beast could deal

with so many of them. But having reached this point, Han Li couldn't afford to think about it much more and could only do his utmost.

Having come to that conclusion, Han Li turned around and whispered something to the scared Mei Ning and Violet Spirit. Afterwards, he handed them a small piece of jade and a soft beast hide shield. He then shook his sleeves and over ten daggers fell onto the ground with a series of clangs.

Each of the daggers had a thin string of beast tendon tied around the hilt, connecting them to each of Han Li's fingers. However, Han Li had yet to control ten of them at one time, making it an unprecedented display.

With his preparations completed, the umbra beasts above finally lost their patience and attacked.

The largest among them, a three headed umbra beast, suddenly let out a terrifying shriek and swooped down without any regard for the Weeping Soul Beast's strength.

The battle had finally begun!

At the same moment the demon beasts attacked, the huge ape took a deep breath and shut its mouth before spewing a mist of silver light from its nose, enveloping most of the umbra beasts in the air. These umbra beasts immediately released a miserable shriek as they dropped from the sky.

However, two of the smaller umbra beasts managed to escape the mist's capture and swept down towards the three humans.

One of the umbra beasts was then smashed away by the huge ape's first and fell over a cliff. As for the other, it appeared to be a two meter long eagle and took advantage of this opening to swoop down right at Han Li's head.

Han Li grimly remained in place, but his fingers made a series of swift and nimble movements. Ten daggers then shot into the air

and turned into a net of glinting daggers in the umbra beast's path.

A dismal scream left the umbra beast's mouth.

Even without the infusion of magic power, the Bamboo Cloudswarm Swords were incredibly sharp. In an instant, the small umbra beast was skewered without resistance. As bloody chunks of flesh filled the sky, Han Li quickly dodged in a blur, but some of them still landed on him. After a slight grimace, he paid it no more attention as there were far more pressing matters at hand: another wave of winged umbra beasts was flying towards them.

This wave had twice the number of the previous group of umbra beasts. Additionally, there were more umbra beasts approaching them from behind with an obvious eagerness to attack.

Han Li's mind grew stern and he instantly waved his arms, forming a net of swords yet again. However, the net now covered a slightly wider range that also protected Mei Ning and Violet Spirit.

Following the mists of silver light and the azure glints, wretched screams quickly filled the sky.

...

Seven days later, under the scorchingly bright noon sun, an expanse of glimmering sea was deathly calm. There wasn't even the slightest wave or sea breeze as if the nearby sea was completely void of life.

Suddenly, a series of waves began to roil and suddenly released a cloud of black fog. The pitch-black fog rapidly permeated throughout the air and instantly spread over several hundred meters.

At that moment, thunder began to clap and silver light flashed from the black fog before a sphere of silver radiance appeared from within it. A faint, wide silhouette with a pair of silver wings could be seen within.

Before this figure could be clearly seen, the silver radiance wildly

flashed several times before completely disappearing, leaving only echoes of thunder behind. A second later, a person could be seen at the edge of the black mist, but he intermittently disappeared and reappeared, filling the sky with flickers of light and rolls of thunder. It appeared as if they wished to escape from that desolate place as quickly as possible.

The sea then returned to silence. Only the rapidly expanding black fog remained, continuing to silently release bursts of black lightning.

About five hundred kilometers away from the black mist, the silver light faded away to reveal Han Li holding Violet Spirit in one arm and Mei Ning in the other. From how tightly they were holding onto him, it appeared quite intimate.

Han Li appeared somewhat better off than the other two. Despite his overwhelmed senses, he managed to keep a calm face. However, the two women in his embrace were slightly scarlet, revealing a heart-moving tenderness.

Han Li took a glance around and wore an expression of relief. He then relaxed his grasp on the two women in an honorable manner and said, "This should be enough. The ghost mist can't reach us now."

"I must truly give my thanks to Fellow Daoist Han. If it weren't for your miraculous movement technique, it's quite likely that we wouldn't have been able to escape."

"Elder Sister Violet Spirit speaks truly. If it weren't for Brother Han's amazingly swift actions, we may have been sucked back into the Umbra Realm. We've troubled Brother Han greatly."

As soon as Violet Spirit and Mei Ning left Han Li's embrace, their bodies began to shine with light as they floated at Han Li's side.

Several days before, the three had encountered many dangers, but managed to climb up to Stormwind Mountain's summit by

relying on the Weeping Soul Beast's strength. During the time they waited for the spacial tear to open, the two women found each other's company extremely agreeable, and not long after, they became sworn sisters, much to Han Li's surprise.

Several days after reaching the summit, a hundred-meter-wide spacial tear appeared about a kilometer above Stormwind Mountain. Massive amounts of Heaven-Earth spiritual Qi began to flow in from the outside, restoring the trio's magic power in an instant and allowing them to fly into the air with joy.

However, Han Li truly didn't expect that in the instant he left the tear that an immense suction force would pull at him from behind. He hadn't been able to move in the slightest and was slowly being dragged back in.

Fortunately, Han Li quickly came to his senses and immediately unfolded the Thunderstorm Wings as he flickered several times to grab onto the two women, before launching himself out of the black mist. As a result, the two gave him their heartfelt thanks.

When Violet Spirit recovered her bearings, she casually swept her gaze over the ocean and frowned, "Where is this place? How can it be so odd? It's completely calm!"

Mei Ning's face appeared puzzled after taking a glance down, "What? It is truly as Elder Sister Violet Spirit says. This is quite amiss, there isn't the slightest breeze and the seas are completely still."

Han Li remained silent as he narrowed his eyes and released his spiritual sense. He began to sweep the depths of the nearby seas, and after a short moment, Han Li revealed an expression of shock.

Violet Spirit had also swept her spiritual sense deep into the seas and after a moment, her beautiful eyes were filled with shock, "Could it be Brother Han has discovered something? There are so few fish in the sea and they all seem to be extremely fierce sea beasts. However, none of them appear to be demon beasts."

“Please wait a moment!” Han Li then took a deep breath and flicked his finger, shooting a ten meter streak of azure swordlight deep into the waters below.

A short moment later, a grotesque sea beast corpse floated to the water’s surface, much to the shock of the two women.

Chapter 596: Marriage to a Concubine

The sea beast corpse before them was over a dozen meters long. It had azure scales on its body and small, sharp teeth. It also had massively swollen eyes. It appeared quite fiendish, but what was most noticeable about its appearance were the crooked tusks that grew from the bottom of its cheeks.

Han Li grew closer to the corpse and carefully examined it several times before a flicker of understanding appeared in his eyes. He then cleaved the demon corpse into two with a streak of swordlight.

With a wave of his hand, a pitch-black item flew into his grasp. He took a whiff of it without any hesitation and found that it had an odd pungent smell that faintly contained a trace of flowery fragrance.

Han Li tossed the item away and revealed a strange expression as he muttered, "So its a Fragrant Tusk Beast."

"Fragrant Tusk Beast?" Violet Spirit was stunned and glanced at Mei Ning. The two women revealed a trace of confusion as it was their first time of hearing such a name.

"It is natural that you two wouldn't know of this sea beast. These beasts are absent in the Scattered Star Seas. They are unique to these strange depths."

Fairy Violet Spirit gravely said, "From your tone, it seems Brother Han already knows that we are no longer in the Scattered Star Seas."

Han Li swept his gaze past the dull ocean and nodded his head with a wry smile, "That is correct. We are no longer in the Scattered Star Seas. Although I've never been here before, I've heard many people speak of it. If I haven't guessed incorrectly, this place should be the Endless Seas." He then turned his head to the

sky and silently became lost in thought.

“The Endless Seas?” They clearly hadn’t heard of this name before.

Violet Spirit muttered to herself before wearing a smile and gently asking, “Brother Han seems to hold some knowledge of these seas. Could you give us sisters an explanation?”

Han Li awoke from his indescribable wave of emotion calmly nodded his head, “Of course. That won’t be a problem. As the term implies, the Endless Seas is known to the Heavenly South Region to be without end. It...” Han Li leisurely began to speak of the legends and hearsays of the Endless Seas in full detail. At the same time he spoke, a question buried deeply in his heart began to surface after remaining there for such a long time.

With a tone of astonishment, Violet Spirit said, “From Brother Han’s words, this Endless Seas should be north of the Heavenly South Region. And not only is there little life in these seas, but there also exists no islands.”

Han Li rubbed his nose and calmly replied, “That’s is right, much to our great distress. Without islands, we fundamentally have no method of determining our location. We have no way of knowing how far we are from the Heavenly South Continent.”

The two women couldn’t help but look at each other dismay.

After some thought, Han Li firmly said, “Regardless, we must head south without delay and reach the mainland before we run out of spirit stones. Hopefully it won’t be too far away.”

Violet Spirit agreed with a trace of helplessness, “Since that is the case, we can only hope that the Heavens favor us!” Mei Ning naturally followed along without complaint.

As a result, the three recognized their bearings before immediately heading south.

Several days later, Mei Ning and Violet Spirit became entirely

convinced of Han Li's judgements. During their entire journey, there were no islands to speak of and the sea was completely void of Qi. Additionally, there wasn't a single demon beast in the oceans, only fierce looking sea beasts.

When these women discovered these circumstances for the first time, they were completely baffled.

Perhaps due to their previous experiences of having undergone tribulations together, the three behaved quite harmoniously and bantered along the journey. As for Han Li, he couldn't help but feel his heart stir in the presence of these two beautiful women.

However, now that he had arrived at the Endless Seas, the face of an icy woman came to mind – Nangong Wan. It was unknown where this Masked Moon Sect Core Formation cultivator had gone, but when he thought of her, a strange emotion began to well in his heart. He couldn't tell whether it was foolish attachment, tender affection, or annoyance, as if a thousand different feelings had muddled his mind. He couldn't make heads of what he currently felt.

Regardless, the party of three continued their flight for four months before eventually spotting an expanse of green on the horizon. The three were immensely rejoiced at the sight, and their most pressing worry was relieved. They then flew towards the mainland in excitement.

The State of Xi was the Heavenly South Region's northmost country. It was about a third smaller than Han Li's home country, the State of Yue, and it was divided into seven provinces. The Min Province was the largest province among them and was also the one that neighbored the Endless Seas.

As of current, Han Li had brought Mei Ning and Violet Spirit to a restaurant's private room in a small city of the Min Province.

Violet Spirit coquettishly glanced at Han Li in feigned anger and said, "Brother Han, so it turned out that you came from the

Heavenly South Region. You've sure put us through a bit of trouble for having hid this so well."

Not long before, Han Li had divulged a few small details about his identity, astonishing the two women. Of course, the two had already guessed as much considering Han Li's familiarity with the Endless Seas, so it hadn't come with too much surprise.

Han Li hoarsely laughed, appearing to be in a good mood. "What is there to say? I unintentionally fled to the Scattered Star Seas. I truly didn't expect to be brought back to the Heavenly South so soon."

Violet Spirit pursed her lips in a smile and playfully said, "Since Brother Han is a lord of the land, he must properly entertain us sisters of course!" Because she feared that her stunning beauty would arouse trouble, she had already restored her original appearance to when she had first met Han Li. However, Han Li still felt shaken by her beauty as if he could see it through her disguise.

"Hehe! Of course. However, I've lost all relation to my sect after fleeing to the Scattered Star Seas. How could I possibly be a lord of this land? However, I'm going to give you each a jade slip that I made in particular to translate the script and language of the Heavenly South. Since you won't be able to return to the Scattered Star Seas for a while, you may as well learn the language. It will make things far more convenient in the future." Han Li then took out two white jade slips he had made the previous night and handed it over to them.

"Hehe! Many thanks, Brother Han!" Violet Spirit was initially stunned, she soon thanked him and chuckled and accepted the jade slip.

Mei Ning also took the jade slip and gratefully whispered thanks.

"However, I imagine you two will have your plans for the future. As for me, I will be preparing to inquire what has happened in the Heavenly South Region the past couple hundred years before

immediately finding a cave residence for secluded cultivation. Because I've faintly felt that I've already reached the peak of Core Formation stage, I want to make preparations to form a Nascent Soul." After Han Li said this, he sipped on the fragrant tea before him and lightly pursed his lips, calmly paying attention to the women's reaction in front of them.

After a moment of consideration, Violet Spirit's luminous eyes rippled as she said, "I've only formed a core just recently and I've yet to stabilize my cultivation. I also intend on finding a cave residence to cultivate for a time before further planning what to do. Little Sister Mei, what do you intend on doing?"

After a moment of hesitation, she muttered, "I... I don't know. I've only reached mid Foundation Establishment stage. Based on my aptitude, my hopes of reaching Core Formation are quite slim. Apart from finding a heaven-defying spirit medicine, my only hope is to find a high grade cultivator and marry him as a concubine. Perhaps I will be able to form a core through pair cultivation!"

Violet Spirit shook her head and dissuaded her, "Don't you feel indignity from marrying as a concubine? How will that do?"

Han Li frowned in response, but he remained silent.

Violet Spirit continued, "Becoming a concubine isn't much different from becoming a cultivation vessel. If you were to come across a malicious high grade cultivator, it wouldn't be unimaginable for him to regard you as a cultivation vessel. This plan isn't reliable."

When Mei Ning heard this, she bit her lips in silence with a sad expression on her face.

After seeing Mei Ning's sad face, Violet Spirit suddenly thought of something and covered her smile in her hand before saying, "Even if little sister wishes to become a concubine for pair cultivation techniques, then it would be best to find a reliable person you are familiar with. For example, I feel like Brother Han

would be very reliable and wouldn't wrong little sister in the slightest."

Han Li was shocked, but soon he calmly rubbed his nose as if this had nothing to do with him. Mei Ning then let out a gasp of surprise and her face soon blushed, revealing a gorgeous allure. She then lowered her head in silence as if she didn't oppose Violet Spirit's scheme.

After all, Han Li held deep cultivation that had already reached late Core Formation stage. Although he was about to prepare to condense a Nascent Soul, from her experience in the Umbra Realm, she came to realize that Han Li wasn't an insidious or unfeeling person.

As a result, even if she didn't have the qualifications to become his Dao companion, she would be quite satisfied to become his concubine.

With her alluring beauty and cultivation, it was inevitable that she would attach herself to a powerful male cultivator. Else, she would encounter great difficulty in the cultivation world, or worse, she would immensely suffer at the hands of others. And with her brother gone, she only had herself to rely on, causing a dreadful encounter to become all the more likely.

The atmosphere in their private room suddenly became exceptionally stale following Violet Spirit's words.

Book 5: Reputation Shaking the Land

Chapter 597: Drifting Cloud Sect

Seeing that Han Li remained silent, Fairy Violet Spirit smiled and asked, “Brother Han, how do you feel about marrying her? Little Sister Mei Ning’s beautiful appearance should more than qualify her enough to become your concubine. Surely you wouldn’t refuse such a pleasant matter that has come knocking on your door?”

Han Li unconsciously frowned and turned to look at the charming, bright appearance of Mei Ning.

Mei Ning held her head low and a faint blush was revealed from her snow-white neck, making for a rather touching scene. It seemed she had tacitly agreed with Violet Spirit’s proposal.

Han Li slowly spoke with a calm expression, “Based on her appearances alone, she wouldn’t qualify as a mere concubine of a high grade cultivator; even being a Dao companion wouldn’t be out of the question. However, I am different from common cultivators. I have dedicated myself to the pursuit of immortality and cannot easily involve myself with the affairs of men and women. Furthermore, I am a lone wanderer and often encounter perilous situations. How could I possibly take in a concubine? If Fellow Daoist Mei were to follow me, it wouldn’t be a good thing for her at all; it would only lead her down a path of unprecedented hardship!”

Mei Ning’s body faintly trembled upon hearing him and her blush hastily faded away. She only raised her head to reveal a paled face.

As if greatly discontent with Han Li’s refusal of the beautiful woman, Violet Spirit annoyedly said, “But in the end, Brother Han is still rejecting her. Needless to say, with your late Core Formation cultivation, who could possibly pose a threat to you apart from Nascent Soul eccentrics? Perhaps Fellow Daoist may soon succeed in condensing a Nascent Soul. After that, the entire world would

be free to roam as you choose. How would you be unable to protect Little Sister Mei Ning?”

Han Li flatly said, “Fellow Daoist Violet Spirit should already be aware. Although I believe myself to be a level higher than similar grade cultivators, I’ve always provoked enmity from foes far stronger than I. Until I reach Nascent Soul stage and possess enough power to defend myself, I cannot possibly consider taking in a concubine. When the time comes that I am incapable of defending her, she will only face a bitter reality.”

Violet Spirit creased her brow, knowing that Han Li had spoken truthfully. Moreover, she faintly felt that Han Li was somewhat displeased. She could only sigh and avoid further mentioning the topic.

Mei Ning eventually recovered her calm and bit her lips while staring at Han Li and asking, “Since Brother Han didn’t reject this little woman based on her lacking appeal, would you be willing to accept me after you enter Nascent Soul stage?”

Han Li looked at the woman and calmly said, “Nascent Soul stage? I don’t have any certainty that I will be able to condense a Nascent Soul. Furthermore, even if I am able to reach the Nascent Soul stage, I have no idea about how many years it will take. Would Fellow Daoist Mei be willing to wait over a hundred years for an uncertain chance that I would be able to condense a Nascent Soul?”

“I...” When Mei Ning heard this, her expression grew unclear and she was incapable of responding. As a Foundation Establishment cultivator, even thirty years was too long, let alone a hundred. Although Han Li made for a very good choice for pair cultivation, she didn’t have the time to wait for an uncertain result.

After all, the cultivation world was a truly cruel place. Although she had only spent a short amount of time together with Han Li

and had a favorable impression of him, it was impossible for her to have fallen so completely in love with him that she'd ignore the consequences.

Seeing her hesitation, Han Li could only inwardly sigh and placed two bottles onto the table before pushing them towards her.

Han Li unhurriedly said, "These are a few cultivation progression pills that I concocted from demon cores. Instead of seeking a man to pair cultivate with, it may be better to diligently cultivate by yourself. Perhaps you'll even form a golden core like Fellow Daoist Violet Spirit."

Since these medicine pills were for Foundation Establishment cultivators, they no longer had any value to Han Li, but since the woman had passed on her Transient Spirit Qi to him, he may as well use this opportunity to repay the favor without much effort. As such, he would no longer need to dwell on the matter.

"Medicine pills concocted from demon cores?" Mei Ning appeared moved and unconsciously reached for one. After opening the bottle's lid, a fragrant odor instantly filled the room. "These are top grade medicine pills!"

Mei Ning then stared at Han Li in confusion. She was at a complete loss for words. Han Li had treated her with such amorous disregard in the Umbra Realm, but he then refused to take her in as a concubine. Even more baffling, he had then taken out precious medicine pills for her.

Fairy Violet Spirit glanced at the medicine pills with a trace of astonishment but she immediately chuckled, "Hehe! Brother Han is truly magnanimous. Since Fellow Daoist Han has said as much, Little Sister should accept them. Perhaps with a few more medicine pills, you will truly be able to enter Core Formation. If that were to occur, us sisters should join hands so that we may travel unfettered."

Mei Ning glanced at Han Li with a complicated expression and

whispered a word of thanks before taking the small medicine bottles into her storage pouch.

Han Li faintly smiled in response and turned towards the window, glancing down at the small city's streets.

It was bustling with activity, reminding Han Li of a familiar scene that he had long forgotten. His smile then turned into a faint sigh.

Seeing that Han Li wore such an expression, Violet Spirit and Mei Ning couldn't help but glance at each other in confusion.

...

The Nan Province was located in the western portion of the State of Xi. The land there was quite complicated, containing many hills and jungles with the occasional swamp miasma occasionally wandering the land. As a result, there were only a few main roads connecting the several villages in the area, and few ever tread into the wilderness. As for the mountain ranges, they were home to particularly vicious beasts, deterring anyone from visiting them.

This had caused the area to be abundant with rare medicinal herbs and beasts, much to the joy of the country's cultivators. This had led to a majority of the country's cultivators to be located in this province. A few of the more powerful cultivator sects even monopolized a few of the areas with the more abundant Spiritual Qi.

As for the mountain range in the province known as the Dreamcloud Mountains, it was an area famed in the Heavenly South for its sacred spirit veins. In the profound spirit veins of the mountain grew the legendary Spirit Well Tree, the final type of the three divine woods.

The local powers held this tree in even greater esteem than the Heaven Lightning Bamboo and Soul Nurturing Wood because of a spirit milk that was produced by the tree every two hundred years

known as “wine nectar”. Although the liquid couldn’t be directly used, it could be refined into many types of exceptionally powerful spiritual medicines. Among these was a legendary sacred medicine known as the Spirit Tempering Pill.

The Spirit Tempering Pill was also known as the Soul Pacifying Pill. Not only could it increase one’s cultivation a certain amount, it could also harden one’s heart and calm one’s soul, alleviating a cultivator of any inner demons that may haunt them.

Condensing a Nascent Soul was quite unlike forming a core. Apart from requiring a certain degree of luck and depth of cultivation, condensing a Nascent Soul also subjected oneself to the disturbances of illusions and inner demons. After all, transforming one’s core into a Nascent Soul was a fearsome test of mental endurance and willpower.

The heaven-defying treasure of the Dreamcloud Mountains’ spirit veins with the addition of the extraordinary concentration of spiritual Qi that it contained had attracted countless sects with the desire to establish their base there. As a result of endless battles and subterfuge, the territory was currently being held by an alliance of three sects: The Ancient Sword Sect, the Drifting Cloud Sect, and the Hundred Possibilities Pavilion.

With the three strongest forces in the State of Xi combining power, other sects could only extinguish any hopes of seizing the spirit veins and watch helplessly.

Sitting down on the steps of one of the peaks of the Dreamcloud Mountains, Han Li was pondering over information that had to do with the mountains and was examining the nearby environment.

There were a few young men and women silently walking on the mountain paths, each with an expression of excitement. When Han Li saw this, he faintly smiled. As the great Drifting Cloud Sect was about to recruit a new batch of new disciples in the coming days, these Qi Condensation youths were brimming with

anticipation.

Having spent half a month in this place, it was only natural that he knew of this. Their famed pill concoction technique was one of various reasons he chose to infiltrate the sect. However, he wasn't going to enter as a Core Formation cultivator, but an ordinary Qi Condensation cultivator.

Unless a mid Nascent Soul cultivator were to closely examine him, none would be able to see through the miraculous effects of the nameless Qi restraining incantation. It was only because of this that he dared to follow through with his plan.

When he suddenly recalled what happened before he had parted with Violet Spirit and Mei Ning, he bitterly chuckled.

According to his original plans, he had found a place to establish a cave residence and consumed a few medicine pills in order to reach the peak of Core Formation stage. While the Transient Spirit Qi had progressed his cultivation somewhat, it wasn't enough to genuinely advance him into False Nascent Stage.

However, something unexpected occurred that had completely overturned his plans.

When he took a medicine pill, he astonishedly discovered that the medicine pill had completely lost effect for him. Regardless of whether it was the grade six demon beast pills or the grade seven demon beasts, they all had no effect on him. He was left at a complete loss.

Chapter 598: The Four Great Powers

Han Li had anticipated that the medicine pills would eventually lose their effect on him. While medicine pills are able to rapidly progress one's cultivation, it possessed its own flaws. When one's magic power reached a certain level, the original medicine pills would lack the medicinal power to be effective. Additionally, with his meridians being purified from the lingering effects of the rainbow beads and his continuously increases in magic power, Han Li became capable of absorbing more spiritual power in one instance. He had reached a stage where his speed at absorbing Heaven-Earth spiritual Qi was nearly the same as absorbing spiritual power from medicine pills.

Of course, this resulted in medicine pills gradually losing their original efficacy. Consequently, even if Han Li took a large amount of Foundation Establishment level pills they would have no effect on him.

However, his current predicament with the ineffective pills was caused from him crossing through entirely different worlds. This was something he couldn't have possibly anticipated.

Both the jade slips and the Nascent Soul cultivator's experiences both mentioned that while grade six demon cores might've no longer been useful, grade seven demon core medicine pills should be effective before a Nascent Soul is formed. However, they now had hardly any effect on him.

After some careful thought, he could only accept that the medicine pills had lost their effectiveness earlier than anticipated and he had finally become resistant to medicine again.

Of course, Han Li guessed that this also may have something to do with either Feng Xi's Jadenfire Wine or Mei Ning's Transient Spirit Qi.

One was an item that humans should've never been able to drink

while the other was one known to be one of the seven purest spiritual Qi in the world. It would be quite ordinary for their use to have repercussions.

Since these circumstances have already occurred, there was no point in investigating the true cause of the loss of medicinal effectiveness since it could no longer be changed. He was unwilling to spend a large amount of effort on something that would be fruitless. Instead, he began to think of plans for the future.

He still had the demon core of the grade eight flood dragon in his hand. But since it was such a precious material that could hardly be found, he was completely unwilling to refine it into a medicine pill since there was such a high chance of failure. Additionally, this would result in only one or two pills; it wouldn't be enough to bring him to false Nascent stage.

As a result, his only choice was to strenuously cultivate to increase his magic power a bit at a time just like everyone else. It was just that he hadn't experienced such slow progress for quite a long time.

With that thought, Han Li couldn't help but bitterly smile.

Fortunately, he was only a short distance away from reaching the peak Core Formation stage. He figured that if he was provided with an abundant amount of spiritual Qi, it would only take him about ten years worth of effort. As such, he had to find a place with acceptable spirit veins. If he were to cultivate in an area with weak spiritual Qi, it would take him several times longer, an unacceptable result.

But when speaking of spirit veins, the Heavenly South Region and the Scattered Star Seas were quite different. The Scattered Star Seas had an abundance of islands and few people with free land as far as the eye could see. There were countless islands with as many unclaimed spirit veins. Contrarily, the land in the Heavenly South was fixed, but there were also many people.

Although the area can be considered large, all of the notable spirit veins had already been occupied by sects and cultivator clans of all sizes. Even the areas with meager spiritual Qi that had escaped their notice were already taken up by vagrant cultivators. There was nothing valuable left.

With sole regards to natural cultivation resources, the Heavenly South Region was far too lacking in comparison with the Scattered Star Seas!

Under these circumstances, Han Li could only sneak into a cultivator clan or sect if he wished to continue his cultivation.

While Han Li's current abilities would allow him to forcefully seize any spirit veins belonging to a cultivation clan or smaller sects and take them over, he feared this would immediately cause him to come under the notice of Nascent Soul cultivators once again. Han Li was done with being pursued by Nascent Soul eccentrics and only wished to condense his Nascent Soul in peace.

But when cultivator clans came to mind, Han Li immediately rejected the idea.

What cultivator clan would have the power to occupy an exceptional spirit veins? None of them would be to his satisfaction. Moreover, outsiders would never be able to mingle inside a cultivator clan.

Cultivation sects were quite different, especially the larger sects. Not only did they occupy the best spirit veins, but they also had many high grade cultivators. Whenever something happened, he wouldn't need to display his true cultivation and there would be little interference with his cultivation. It was truly leisurely to take cover underneath a larger power

After he condensed a Nascent Soul, he would no longer have anything to fear. He reckoned that when that time came, the upper echelon of any sect would try to entice him through any means possible if he were to reveal himself. After all, who would be so

foolish as to make enemies with a Nascent Soul cultivator?

With this in mind, Han Li began to recall the sacred spirit veins of Dreamcloud Mountain which were renowned in the entirety of the Heavenly South Region. In the end, the three great cultivator sects that occupied the spirit veins became priority targets for Han Li.

Since he wished to enter one of the sects, Han Li naturally needed to compare the three sects' characteristics and drawbacks.

But before all of this occurred, Han Li had already paid a visit to a small market city and acquired information on the past hundred years in the Heavenly South Region.

Before Han Li had parted ways with the two sworn sisters, he had shared a bit of information with them. As the two women were foreigners to this land, they particularly desired to become familiar with the circumstances and great powers of this land.

The Heavenly South Region's power structure had greatly changed since Han Li had last been there.

First of all, the nine countries of the Heavenly South had been divided between the Devil Dao, the Righteous Dao, the Heavenly Dao Alliance, and the Nine Nations Union. There were no longer individual powers controlling each of the states.

Previously, Han Li was only aware of the Righteous Dao, Devilish Dao, and the Nine Nations Alliance. After Han Li had left for the Scattered Star Seas, the superpower known as the Heavenly Dao Alliance was formed. It consisted of the cultivators of over ten various sized countries in order to stand in opposition against the Righteous and Devilish Dao. While it was larger than both the Devil and the Righteous Dao, it wouldn't be a match if the Righteous and Devil Dao were to band together.

However, it was only by a tacit agreement that the two sides wouldn't interfere with one another while they expanded by

annexing their neighboring countries. Even during this short moment of peace, they still considered themselves enemies the entire time. There was no possible way they could possibly form an alliance.

Additionally, disputes had risen internally over the distribution of their newly found gains and both sides had sunk into internal strife. Neither of them were interested in confronting the Heavenly Dao Alliance.

As for the Heavenly Dao Alliance, they were only a loosely connected alliance to begin with. Having the Righteous and Devil Dao leave them alone was exactly what they had wanted. Also, it was likely they didn't have the courage to attack them in the first place.

With this, the three superpowers came to an equilibrium.

In fact, the reason as to why there was a hundred years of peace had much to do with the Nine Nations Union.

The Nine Nations Union had taken many of the cultivation sects and vagrant cultivators that were displaced by the Righteous and Devil Dao, including the Seven Sects of Yue, and were greatly strengthened as a result. With this great increase in power, they had originally believed that they would be able to suppress the spell warriors of the Moulan Plains. However, they truly didn't expect that in their war with the Moulan tribes, that the formidable armies of two additional tribes would come to their aid in such a timely coincidence, multiplying the number of spell warriors.

The battle between both sides intensified and led to several large battles, resulting in a massive amount of deaths on both sides. Even so, the Nine Nations Union found themselves at a disadvantage and even had some of their land seized.

Helpless, the Nine Nations Union began to request assistance from the Devil Dao, Righteous Dao, and Heavenly Dao Alliance for

assistance. They also threatened that if the three powers were unwilling to send men, they would bluntly withdraw, and allow the Moulan's spell warriors to enter their lands.

When the three parties received this information, they all sent men to assist despite their unwillingness. They all knew that if the Nine Nations Union were to withdraw, then the ferocious Moulan's spell warriors would bring them no small amount of trouble in the coming days.

With the reinforcements, the Nine Nations Union was able to score a decisive victory, leaving several thousands of cultivators dead. They were able to gain steady footing against the Moulan's attacks and were once again able to stand firm.

From then on, the Nine Nations Union decided to shrewdly request the three superpowers to alternatively send them reinforcements in order to resist the Moulan's attacks. Otherwise, if the three superpowers chose to remain passive, then they would do so as well and allow the Moulan to freely wreak havoc in their territories.

Thus after long negotiations, the four superpowers eventually reached an agreement. With the Nine Nations Union as the leader and the other three parties as subordinates, they created a joint pact against the Moulan.

As a result of this pact, the Righteous and Devil Dao had managed to remain at peace for over a hundred years despite having completely annexed their massive domains. With the threat of the Moulan covetously looming over their shoulders, they didn't dare to rashly start another war.

As for the State of Xi and its two neighboring countries, they both belonged to the Heavenly Dao Alliance. The Ancient Sword Sect, the Drifting Cloud Sect, and Hundred Possibilities Pavilion were among the core sects of the alliance.

Chapter 599: Entering The Sect (1)

Of the three sects controlling the sacred spirit veins, the most optimal choice for Han Li wasn't the Drifting Cloud Sect but the Hundred Possibilities Sect that was well known for its tool refinement.

In addition to his original goals of finding a cultivation area, the Hundred Possibilities Sect disciples were particularly adept at refining all sorts of magic tools. Rumor has it that the sect even possessed refinement methods for peak grade magic treasures.

These treasures caused Han Li's heart to stir. However, it was a pity that the sect recruited disciples in the same manner as the State of Yue's Seven Sects used to: they prioritized recruitment from cultivation clans and only rarely accepted outsiders as disciples.

Furthermore, a union of the five most powerful cultivator clans within the sect had monopolized the sect's allocated section of the Dreamcloud Mountain's spirit veins in the west. Both of these factors had caused Han Li to relinquish any thoughts of joining this sect with slight regret.

As for the Ancient Sword Sect, as its name implies, it is extremely adept at sword controlling techniques. All of their magic tools and magic treasures were various types of differently sized swords. As for the sect protecting arts, the True Absolute Sword Arts, it was incredibly incisive and was widely known throughout the country.

The Ancient Sword Sect didn't exclusively take in disciples from cultivator clans, it also took in young vagrant cultivators. However, the sect required one to be extremely suited to their sword arts. If one's aptitude didn't match the sect's cultivation techniques, they weren't taken in. This was why they had the fewest disciples of the three sects despite how often they were recruiting.

On the other hand, by relying on their domineering attacks, the disciples of the Ancient Sword Sect prevailed over opponents of similar cultivation, leading the sect to be the most powerful of the three. As a matter of course, they held the main spirit vein of Dreamcloud Mountain.

The final sect was the Drifting Cloud Sect. Instead of being renowned for its weapon refinement like the Hundred Possibilities Sect, the Drifting Cloud Sect was famed for its pill concoction.

The legendary Spirit Tempering Pill was something that only a few of the sect's elders were capable of concocting. So despite the sect's inferior strength in comparison to the other two, it managed to acquire the east portion of the mountain's spirit vein. Additionally, the Drifting Cloud Sect recruited the most disciples and possessed the least demanding requirements.

On a whole, the sect only had two conditions for accepting disciples: Primarily, it required that that one possessed decent spiritual roots and a capacity to be nurtured. Lacking that, they were also more than willing to accept any disciples that had poor aptitudes so long as their cultivation had already reached a high enough layer.

After all, the Drifting Cloud Sect pursued a disorganized assortment of various disciplines outside of its renowned pill concoction technique. These fledgling disciplines required large quantities of low level cultivators in order to progress.

As for vagrant Qi Condensation cultivators with poor aptitudes, they clearly understood that they had no future prospects after joining the sect and would eternally be low grade disciples. Regardless, they joined with thoughts similar to Han Li's; It was quite convenient to take shelter in the great power of the Drifting Cloud Sect. It was for this reason that vagrant cultivators flocked to the sect in large numbers.

With the lax acceptance policies and the enticement of the

legendary Spirit Tempering Pill, the sect seemed to be the optimal choice for Han Li to infiltrate.

With some lingering uncertainty, Han Li made a few additional inquiries and learned that the sect would soon be taking in more disciples, immediately dispelling any of his reservations. Without revealing any of his plans, he immediately took off and parted with the two women after making a few preparations.

As recruitment day drew near, many Qi Condensation cultivators began to gather on the road. When Han Li saw this from the top of his mountain, he calmly joined them.

On his walk along the path, he unhurriedly walked for about two hours without reaching the end. This wasn't because the mountain was large but because the stone roads were being affected by a few shallow illusion techniques. They probably wished to use this to grind down the number of cultivators that wished to enter the sect.

Given the lax entrance conditions of the Drifting Cloud Sect, they may as well cull the cultivators that were too impatient to walk along the path.

The several cultivators that walked in front of Han Li had discovered something amiss, and immediately gathered together and started whispering to each other. They seemed to have guessed what was going on and continued to walk forward without hesitation.

The group of cultivators seemed to be acquaintances. Despite having been ignored, Han Li continued on his way without paying them any heed.

After yet another hour walking along the stone path, they eventually reached some blue stairs. The group of cultivators happily quickened their pace as they climbed up the stairs. Still indifferent, Han Li calmly climbed the steps and examined the scene at the top.

There was a huge, pure white platform that was over four hundred meters wide, and the only other structure present was a small unremarkable pavilion on the other side. There were several tens of different groups of variously clothed cultivators around it, but no one dared to step inside the pavilion. As for Han Li and the group in front of him, they wordlessly joined groups already there and sat down among them.

Han Li inwardly sneered at the scene in front of him. While Qi Condensation vagrant cultivators were unable to see anything, Han Li was able to see through the illusion formation with his spiritual sense.

The small stone pavilion before them was actually a huge white jade tower. A sign hung from the tower had three large golden words, “Illusory Cloud Hall”. Three people stood underneath the huge sign and were looking down at the unknowing Qi Condensation cultivators below, talking amongst themselves as they gestured.

They relied solely on the spell formation for concealment and made no other effort to hide themselves.

Of the three, two were early Foundation Establishment cultivators while one was a mid Foundation Establishment cultivator. It seemed the three of them were in charge of receiving the newcomers.

Han Li wordlessly walked amongst the nearby crowd and sat down at the edge with his head down. Although he closed his eyes, his spiritual sense completely enveloped the three Foundation Establishment cultivators and he easily eavesdropped on their conversation.

A pale faced youth that appeared to be in his late twenties pointed down at the crowd and spoke with a tone of dissatisfaction, “Senior Martial Brother Qiu! Although the deadline hasn’t yet been reached, there aren’t many vagrant cultivators that

have caught our eye. Most of the cultivators here wouldn't even pass the qualifications, and are clearly only at the seventh layer of Qi Condensation. Do they think that the Drifting Cloud Sect takes everyone?"

"There is nothing we can do. Three years ago, our sect accepted a large batch of disciples because they were suitable. And because Senior Martial Uncle Jin was short on manpower, there was an exception made to accept two eighth layer Qi Condensation cultivators at the time. This produced a misconception that it is easier to enter our sect, which is why there are so many vagrant cultivators that have come to try their luck." The man called Senior Martial Brother Qiu was a white-robed mid Foundation Establishment cultivator in his forties with a stern, squarish face and bright eyes.

A vigorous youth with a heroic air chuckled and added, "Of course, we aren't going to be so lenient this time around. After all, the recently accepted low grade disciples have been on the shoddier side with regards to their spiritual roots and cultivation. It seems an elder took notice of this and has already warned the sect master. As such, we will follow the sect master's word to accept nothing but quality."

The pale-faced youth glanced down at the vagrant cultivators and disdainfully said, "Accept nothing but quality! If that's the case, then it would be fine if we choose ten disciples and have the rest of them leave."

Senior Martial Brother Qiu glanced at the pale-faced youth and calmly said, "Senior Martial Brother Liu shouldn't underestimate these vagrant cultivators. There may truly be a few unfounded geniuses among them. Junior Martial Brother Sun Huo was once a vagrant cultivator too, but he managed to reach Foundation Establishment with a mere five years of hard work. Although he was given a suitable cultivation technique and a Foundation Establishment Pill for his quickly acquired merits, this can also be

considered part of his aptitude.”

When the pale-faced youth heard him, he quickly thought of something and dryly coughed. He then quickly smiled as if he felt some fear towards Senior Martial Brother Qiu and said, “Senior Martial Brother is correct. I’ve spoken wrongly!”

Senior Martial Brother Qiu was about to say more to the youth, but Han Li wasn’t interested, so he recalled his spiritual sense and began to meditate.

As of current, he had restrained his Qi to the point where other cultivators only perceived him to be a tenth layer Qi Condensation cultivator. He should have no trouble entering the sect!

About half a day later, there were many more cultivators in the crowd that had climbed up the stone steps. By the time the sun set, there were nearly a hundred Qi Condensation cultivators sitting on the stage. A majority of the cultivators there were youths, but there was also a middle-aged man with a particularly profound cultivation.

At that moment, an expanse of red light suddenly burst forth from the stone pavilion and it disappeared to reveal a hundred meter tall tower along with the three silhouettes standing above.

Senior Martial Brother Qiu swept his gaze across the crowd with a stern expression and calmly said, “We welcome all of you Fellow Daoists to our Drifting Cloud Sect. My Martial Brothers and I will be in charge of evaluating you disciples. I hope you Fellow Daoists will clearly listen to what I will say next. Don’t miss it.”

Chapter 600: Entering The Sect (2)

Upon seeing the sudden changes and hearing Senior Martial Brother Qiu's words, the cultivators on the platform were left shocked for a moment and hurriedly stood up, each wearing respectful and attentive expressions. All of the cultivators there knew that if they were to enter to great Drifting Cloud Sect, they absolutely couldn't afford to leave a bad impression to the three men standing on the tower.

Senior Martial Brother Qiu revealed satisfaction upon seeing that the vagrant cultivators were so tactful.

Senior Martial Brother Qiu slowly said with a solemn expression, "You Fellow Daoists should all know the criteria by which we accept disciples. This being the case, I won't go into detail. Let's have our Fellow Daoists who possess tri-attribute, dual-attribute, or special spiritual roots walk forward."

Once this was said, the crowd stirred. After a short moment, only four people walked forward, three men and one woman.

Senior Martial Brother Liu swept his gaze past them and calmly said, "You four will follow Junior Martial Brother Liu. He will be in charge of evaluating your cultivation aptitude."

At that moment, the pale faced youth stepped forward and wordlessly waved his arm. A white streak of light then flew out from his sleeve and circled in the air before turning into a huge embroidered scarf. It gently floated about a meter off the ground.

The pale-faced youth reappeared atop the scarf magic tool in a blur and expressionlessly said, "Climb onto it. I'll bring you four to another place and examine your aptitude there. Those that are unsuitable will naturally be sent back."

When the four heard this, they glanced at each other with slight hesitation before climbing onto the scarf. Then pale-faced youth

then clutched his hands in an incantation gesture and caused the scarf to glow brightly with white light before it set off to the sky in a streak of white light.

After sending off the pale-faced youth, Senior Martial Brother Liu glanced down at those who remained and continued, "Those with cultivation at the tenth layer and higher, step forward and follow Junior Martial Brother Yu. So long as one doesn't have too much a problem with their identities, they will be able to enter the sect. As for you remaining Fellow Daoists, if you wish to enter the sect, then you are required to pass a test before you will be taken into our Drifting Cloud Sect. If you fail, I can only ask you all to diligently cultivate for several more years and come back once you've improved." Once that was said, an uproar occurred amongst the crowd. Apart from a few peculiar individuals, a majority of them revealed a disappointed expression.

It seemed the standards of this selection would be far more strict. This had caused a few cultivators hoping for a fluke to grow greatly dispirited. Although he did say they could participate in a test and still join the sect, everyone knew that they were words spoken out of politeness.

After all, with the number of people that had come, there would be no way for the Drifting Cloud Sect to give all of them a chance.

Needless to say, these tests would be extremely difficult to pass if one's cultivation was beneath the tenth layer. Only cultivators at the ninth layer of Qi condensation would hold even the slightest chance of success. In the past, only a sparse few cultivators at the ninth layer were able to pass these tests.

Although these people all had poor aptitude, they were able to succeed through a show of exceptional perseverance. As a result, despite their lacking future prospects, Drifting Cloud Sect would be willing to accept them as they would be able to contribute towards their various fledgling disciplines.

Underneath the envious gaze of the rest of the crowd, Han Li and six other cultivators walked forward.

Senior Martial Brother Qiu swept his gaze past them and nodded his head.

When the youth with the heroic aura saw this, he released a flying magic tool without any delay. A huge bronze alms bowl appeared before them.

Without needing any words from the youth, Han Li and the group of cultivators obediently climbed onto the magic tool. The copper alms bowl then flew off deep into the Dreamcloud Mountains in a streak of light.

As for the remaining vagrant cultivators that didn't qualify, Han Li was completely unaware as to whether any of them entered the sect, nor did he care enough to find out.

At that moment, he was absorbed in examining the six others that were enveloped in the alms bowl's yellow light alongside him. There were four men and two women. Apart from refined yellow-clothed woman that appeared about twenty years old, the others appeared to be in their thirties.

There was even a fifty year old cultivator. Although he possessed the deepest cultivation of the group at the twelfth layer of the Qi Condensation cultivator, Han Li could only shake his head and inwardly sigh.

If they didn't have much luck, cultivators with poor aptitudes had to spend an immense amount of time cultivating if they wished to reach the tenth layer or higher, resulting in only Han Li and the yellow-clothed woman to have the youngest appearance in the group.

If it weren't for the mysterious bottle that Han Li had encountered, he feared he would've spent most of his life cultivating like the twelfth layer cultivator, yet only to reach the

sixth layer. Entering a large cultivation sect would've obviously been out of the question.

When Han Li began to ponder about the past, he entered a rare state of absent-mindedness.

Soon after, he regained clarity of mind and looked at the others. While they didn't appear to be particularly notable, they had facefuls of excitement.

But when Han Li's gaze fell onto large man with sideburns, he narrowed his eyes for a moment, but soon his expression returned to normal.

This wasn't because of anything unusual about the man's appearance, but because there was a trace of indescribable cold Yin Qi. This Yin Qi was very well hidden. If it weren't for Han Li's extraordinary spiritual sense, he would've completely missed it. This definitely wasn't a cultivation art that belonged to the five elements. From the fluctuations of his spiritual Qi, he clearly possessed some unusual magic techniques.

However, the large man's tenth layer cultivation wasn't even the slightest bit false, causing Han Li to ponder with curiosity.

As Han Li was lost in thought, a huge expanse of endless fog appeared before the huge alms bowl. This white fog was extremely dense and roiled with sounds of thunder faintly echoing out.

Han Li's heart stirred and sent out his spiritual sense. However, something had blocked it when he attempted to reach about thirty meters into the mist.

Han Li inwardly trembled, knowing that the white mist was an uncommon restriction. It was likely one of the Drifting Cloud Sect's formidable sect protecting restrictions. He didn't dare to further rashly test it and hastily recalled his spiritual sense.

The group of vagrant cultivators all revealed an expression of awe when they saw the endless mist. Although they've never come

across a spell formation before, this astonishing restriction before them had greatly broadened their perspectives.

At that moment, the youth surnamed Yu formed a hand incantation and had his flying magic tool slowly come to a stop. Then he grasped his storage pouch and took out an azure formation flag.

After muttering something, the flag in his hand began to glow with a piercing radiance that gradually grew larger.

"Open!" After the youth finished his incantation, he glared at the fog and pointed the formation flag at it. A bowl-thick azure beam of light shot out from the tip of the flag and straight into the mist, leading to an astonishing scene.

The other areas of the fog roiled as ordinary, but the portion of the fog in front of them became extremely calm. Then following a series of clear chimes, the white Qi parted before them, revealing a ten-meter-wide passage.

After this occurred, the youth surnamed Yu carried the group through the passage without delay. In the blink of an eye, they disappeared from sight.

Not long after, the passage closed and the sounds of thunder sounded out once more.

After the time it took to finish a cup of tea, the group eventually passed through the mist and emerged before the hidden land.

Before they could even clearly see past the fog, they felt dense spiritual Qi rush against them. Han Li couldn't help but take in a deep breath and feel a trace of joy well up inside him as he looked forward.

There was a huge expanse of earth with verdant greenery, fragrant aromas, birdsong, and several mountains that spanned over three kilometers tall, reaching out as far as the eye could see. Surrounding these mountains were buildings of various sizes including palace halls and pavilions of countless numbers along

with many various clothed cultivators rushing about in a hurry.

After seeing their surprise and excitement, he silently smiled. He then pointed to the nearest mountain peak and said, "Take a good look. These is the Six Marvelous Peaks of the Drifting Cloud Sect's monastery. If you truly enter our sect, this will be your home. But first, we will head to Dayspring Mountain's Initiation Residence. You'll explain a bit about your past and then we will test your cultivation."

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